

**CASTE CONSCIOUSNESS AND CASTE CONFLICT IN BIHAR  
1890 to 1930**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
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## CERTIFICATE

Certified that the Dissertation entitled "CASTE CONSCIOUSNESS AND CASTE CONFLICT IN BIHAR 1890 TO 1930" Submitted by RENU KUMARI in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY, has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University.

It is recommended that, this Dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluations.

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Renu Kumari

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## INTRODUCTION

Caste cannot be abolished in India, and to attempt it would be one of the most hazardous operations that was ever performed in a political body. As a religious institution caste will die; as social institution it will live and improve<sup>1</sup>.

Caste in India appears to be a peculiar organisation where the population regards themselves divided in distinct groups enjoying different social dignities and practising elaborate restrictions about inter-group dining and drinking. When the Portuguese reached the west coast of India. they had noted this division and called it Casta - meaning breed in their own language - because of the hereditary nature of this distinction. From then the name 'caste' came into use, to signify this social division.<sup>2</sup> The Indians name the division jati, a word which also means race.

There is little unanimity over the definition of caste among sociologists and social anthropologists. For Kroeber

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1. Max Muller (1869), Chips From a German Workshop Vol. II, New York: Charles Scribner & Co., p.353.

2. Hutton J.H. Caste in India, p.47.

(1931) a caste is an endogamous and hereditary subdivision of an ethnic unit with a relative social rank<sup>3</sup>. E.R. Leach emphasizes the social inter relationships in the caste system.<sup>4</sup> M.N. Srinivas considers relative rank, traditional occupation and endogamy as important characteristics of caste.<sup>5</sup> Endogamy, ritually determined hierarchical position and traditional occupation have also been regarded as essential features of caste by Dube. S.C.. Ghosh, McK Marriott and Gerald. D.Berreman<sup>6</sup> have emphasized endogamy and relative rank in defining caste. Though accepting that caste is a hereditary indogamous group, Baily states that caste cannot be placed in a definitive social hierarchy.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, western observers have emphasized the inequities and consequent injustices of the system. The American sociologist, Kingsley Davis, said, "The Hindu

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3. " A caste may be defined as an endogamous and hereditary subdivision of an ethnic unit occupying a position of superior or inferior rank of social esteem in comparison with other subdivision", Kroeber.

4. E.R. Leach, Aspects of Caste, p.10.

5. M.N. Srinivas, Caste in Modern India and Other Essays, 1962, p.3.

6. S.C. Dube., Indian Village, pp.34-44.

G.D. Berreman, Hindus of the Himalayas, 1963, p.198.

7. F.G. Baily, Caste and the Economic Frontier, 1958, p.265.

social order is the most through going attempt known in human history to introduce absolute inequality as the guiding principle in social relation.<sup>8</sup> Berreman has spoken out against the "sentence" which birth deals out to the member of a caste for life. For the lower caste-person, that sentence is a life of disprivileges of all sorts.<sup>9</sup> The French social anthropologist, Louis Dumont accused such critics of being sociocentric perceiving and judging from the vantage point of ones own society. Dumont argues that, in contrast to the competitive western system which emphasizes individual ambition. The caste system involves a "holism" an orientation towards the welfare of all. Certainly all castes do not receive equal rewards; but this he explains is because all do not contribute equally, as judged by the underlying value of the caste system. Thus Dumont argues that although all not equally rewarded all are integrated into a system. By Hindu ideals, all are cared for; the system exists for the benefit of all.<sup>10</sup>

The caste system is related to a different economic and political context - a stagnant paleotechnic agrarian

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8. D. Kingsley, The Population of India and Pakistan, 1951, p.170.

9. G.D. Berreman, Race Caste and Other Invidious Distinctions in Social Stratification, 1972, p.

10. D.Louis, Homo Hierarchicus, 1970, p.107.

economy supporting some craftsmen, priests and religious mendicants, a monarch, his bureaucracy, an an army in a chronically unstable political condition. To find parallel with such a society in the west, one draws upon concept from the ages. feuldalism, the manor, estates, fealty to one's lord, subordination to ones' "betters". The conception of society as an organism in which each social segment contributed its function, the uneasy balance between church and state the peasantry protected in the lord's fortress, the hundred years wars.

Although the constant feature in caste is the kinship structure which emerges through endogamy and the occupational specialization is in decline. The caste system represented by a set of interdependent artisans or servants is also in decline. Showing sings of decline also is the system of purity and pollution which ranked caste to each other and kept them separate from one another. So the traditional caste system as set of occupationally specialized, interdependent castes, ranked by purity and pollution customs, shows signs of disappearing. Though there customs related to the jati system are being practiced by the Hindus even to this date.

Bihar is such a province of India where the casteism is much pronounced in almost every walk of life. There are



historical reasons. Till 1911, Bihar was a part of the province of Bengal with Calcutta as capital. From 1836 to 1911, for about seventy-five years it had no separate existence as a province. It played a very significant role in the uprising of 1857 against the British. On the contrary in Bengal the sepoys in revolt received neither support nor sympathy from the local people. The educated population of Calcutta and the landed aristocracy of Bengal openly denounced the rebellion and the participants. An address pleading loyalty to the English was presented by the Maharaja of Burdwan and 2501 other signatories after the fall of Delhi recounting the benefits of the company's rule.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently the British became indifferent to Bihar. After 1857, Bihar experienced step-motherly treatment from the government of Bengal. The pace of development in Bihar in all fields was much slower compared with that of Bengal.<sup>12</sup>

Besides Calcutta being the capital of the province, as well as of the whole country, the Bengali benefitted from

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11. S.N. Sen, Eighteen Fifty Seven, Delhi 1957, pp.407-408.

12. V.C.P. Chaudhari, The Creation of Modern Bihar, Patna, 1965, pp.10-13.

the opportunities for education and employment. The renaissance in Bengal did not touch the Biharis much. Bihar remained sunk in poverty notwithstanding its fertile land and potentialities for economic development. In spite of good soil and advantage of good climate the condition of the agricultural population was very precarious. Famine occurred more frequently and everytime a large number of people perished and a great deal of hardship ensued. The condition of the peasantry in Bengal was much better.<sup>13</sup>

Even after Bihar separated from Bengal, the benefit of employment education and participation in politics was enjoyed by the upper castes who themselves were divided on caste lines. Consequent upon the English education in India, the country witnessed several attempts at social reforms. In Bihar, under the aegis of Arya Samaj, such movements began in the end of the last century. But interestingly, here the units were castes, not village or regions. In Bihar one has to refer to such movements as those among the Kayasthas or Yadavas, but no example of such reforms is known in which all the different castes in a region participated in the same movement. In 1911 census there were only four thousand eighty five persons enumerated as Arya Samajists and four

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13. Sir J. Stracey, India, Its Administration and Progress, London, 1888, p.456.

fifths of them were in the Patna district. In spite of the two visits made by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (first time in 1872 and the second time in 1877 or 1878) The Arya Samaj could not make much headway. Its doctrines found favour only within limited number of people belonging to the low castes such as Kurmis, Kahars, etc. It failed to make any appeal to the upper castes.<sup>14</sup>

Caste reform started. All castes started claiming of higher education. No movement was launched on the region or village basis. So caste consciousness increased.

In Bihar, the zamindar tenant division corresponded more or less to upper and middle caste division. The first expression of assertion by the tenants, regarding Tenancy Acts, passed during the late nineteenth century, was to denounce the social superiority of the zamindars. Along with wearing the sacred thread and assuring upper caste titles, the middle caste tenants also had stopped bowing to the zamindars, consequently many caste riots took place. Caste riots in turn fostered caste-consciousness which is still very strong in Bihar.

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14. Census of India, 1921, Vol. VII, Bihar and Orissa, Part I, Patna 1923, pp.121-123.

The present work is an effort to trace the process of this caste based developments in Bihar from the late nineteenth and till the nineteen thirty. The whole work is divided into three main chapters. The First Chapter is an outline and analysis of caste-structure in Bihar during that period. The division of society on caste lines and the occupational specialization prevailing at that time along with the hierarchical structure of the different caste is discussed. Some notes on the origin of some castes, which created considerable stir at that time is also given.

The Second Chapter deals with the rise and growth of caste consciousness through different caste associations during and twentieth century. The Third Chapter contains the rise and growth of the Gwalla Movement in Bihar. Along with this an incident of caste riot is also discussed.

The information on caste conflicts is very scanty. Due to the limitation of time it has not been possible to look into sources which are not readily available in repositories. Yet, an attempt has been made to make use of available published and unpublished sources. This is only a preliminary work which opens up a hitherto relatively in research area in the history of Bihar.

## CHAPTER 1

### CASTE STRUCTURE

The division of society on the basis of caste is a social phenomena existing not only in Bihar, but in India as a whole which is continuing still now with different connotations. It has been the backbone of the Indian social system. It is not confined to Hindus alone but is found to persist in some form or other among India Muslims, and is found even among Christian converts generations after conversion. Although social institutions which resemble caste in one respect or another is not difficult to find in other countries, it is peculiarly an Indian phenomenon especially its hierarchical gradation of high and low. No institution as complex and elaborate exists elsewhere. The variety and complexity of the social forces which produced the caste system were not to be found in any other country.<sup>1</sup>

A general definition of caste may call it a group having common origin, a common social organisation and a common occupation and whose members eat and drink together

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1. Dumont, Louis, Homo Hierarchicus, p.239-258.  
Berreman, Gerald D., "Stratification Pluralism and Interaction: A Comparative Analysis of Caste in A.V.S. de Reuck and Julie Knight eds., Caste and Race : Comparative Approaches pp. 45-73.

and intermarry. Ghurye has regarded the concept of purity pollution as the basic principle of caste stratification. While Hutton and others have considered the behavioral manifestations of these beliefs to be so complex as to baffle analysis.<sup>2</sup>

The persistence of caste in India, even among educated and modernised Indians, is due to a kind of micro-community organisation which are large scale descent groups. This kind of community organisation is not found in West and it is more characteristic of tribes elsewhere than it is of either classes or racial segments in modern western society. Sociologists and social anthropologists have written abundantly on caste, changes in caste structure and its role in modern India. Hutton mentions various social, political and economic function of the cast system. Both for the individual members and for the society as a whole. However he emphasises that what makes the Indian caste system unique, is the function it performs for the integrity and stability of entire system. In his own words, "it will be understood then that one important function of caste, perhaps, the most important of all its functions which makes caste in India a unique institution, is to integrate Indian

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2. Hutton. J.H., Caste in India, p. 155.

society, to weld into one community the various competing if not in competable group comprising it.<sup>3</sup> Ghurye writes about the organisation of the Indian social structure - "Every where in India there is a definite scheme of social precedence amongst the castes, with a Brahmin at head of the hierarchy."<sup>4</sup> It has been found difficult to define caste in a way which will apply to the whole of India and which will always hold true. Some castes such as Rajputs have no common origin, higher castes have no common caste organisation, occupation may be chosen at will and the members of one caste may not eat or dine together or intermarry. Exception are so few in number that generalisation is difficult.<sup>5</sup>

#### Castes in Bihar

The various castes of Bihar can be put in three main categories - the upper castes, the backward castes and the scheduled castes. The Brahmins, the Bhumihars, the Rajputs and the Kayasthas were the upper castes in Bihar while a large number of caste consisting of either craftsmen or men

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3. Hutton, J.H., op.cit, p.111-132.

4. Ghurye, G.S. Caste and Race in India, p.6.

5. Diwakar, R.R., Bihar Through Ages, p.691.  
Hutton, J.H., op.cit, p.47.

pursuing certain type of profession were backward castes. In the third category, the so called untouchables doing crafts or profession of the kind that Hindu orthodoxy look down upon, were placed.<sup>6</sup>

The Brahmins were situated at the apex of caste system who were split up in numerous subdivision, of which there were three main groups, namely the Pashchima Brahmins, the Tirhutiya or the Maithil Brahmins and the Magadh Brahmins. Pashchima Brahmins consist of the Saryuparins, the Kanya Kubja, the Yazurvedis, the sakaldwipias etc. They were inhabitants mostly of Shahabad, Saran, Champaran, Muzaffarpur, western parts of Patna, some part of Gaya, Palamau and Bhagalpur. For them Varanasi has been the main cultural and religious centre. Their customs and rituals are the same as of their counterparts in U.P. and Madhya Pradesh. The overwhelming majority of them speak Bhojpuri.<sup>7</sup>

The second group is of Tirhutiya Brahmins or Maithli Brahmins, who were the original inhabitants of Tirhuta and Mithila, having two branches the Shrotriya (very small in

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6. Jha ShashiShekhar - Political Elite in Bihar, p.20.

7. Bengal District Gazetters - Shahabad, Muzaffarpur, 1907



number)<sup>8</sup> and the ordinary Maithil Brahmins, because they failed to follow the orthodox path. They resided mostly in the district of Darbhanga, Purnea, Saharsa, Muzaffarpur and Monghyr. For them Darbhanga was the cultural centre. They had their own customs, traditions and calendars, and they spoke Maithili.<sup>9</sup>

The last group of Brahmin viz. Magadh Brahmins were numerically insignificant. They were residents of Patna, Gaya and Monghyr and sometimes they called themselves Shrotriya also. Their 'gotras' were generally after the disciples of Lord Buddha, as some of them were Mudgalyan by their gotras.

In each of these three divisions, there were Brahmin who has become degraded on account of their acting as priests for low castes, or on account of their performing the office of Karkatah or Mahapatras, that is accepting gifts in Shraddha ceremony. All of these three groups of

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8. 'Shrotriya's are thought to those who were the scholars of Shruti and Hindu Religious Texts and they were understood to be more pure.

9. Bengal District Gazetters, Shahabad, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Gaya, 1907.

Brahmin were endogamous one.<sup>10</sup>

The Bhumi-hars, the Rajputs and other castes also had a number of sub castes but they were not much significant except that they indicated their place in the hierarchy. Inter sub-caste marriages among them were not prohibited. The kayasthas had twelve main sub-castes viz- Srivastawas, Ambashthas, Asthanas, Karnas etc. Srivastava Kayasthas were found mostly in western part of the state. Their language was Bhojpuri. Karnas were the inhabitants of Mithila, and have a greater affinity with Maithil Brahmins.<sup>11</sup>

The division of caste into a number of sub-castes had various reasons. The sub-caste was a small endogamous group within a caste. Even residence or settling down in a different region away from the original homeland for long stretches of time has led to the formation of different sub-castes. The adoption or abandonment of a degrading occupation, variation in social practices, pollution incurred by one section of a caste, a split in the governing body, the greater prosperity of one section compared to the

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10. C.J.O. Donnel - The Census of India, 1891, Vol.V, Calcutta 1893, pp. 76 and 208.

11. Bengal District Gazetteers - Darbhanga 1909.

rest and so on were among the factors that promoted fission among a caste. How difference in occupation led to the formation of sub-castes can be illustrated from the Doms. They were divided into Banukias, who breded silk-worms, Dai-Doms, whose women acted as midwives; Topasurias, who removed dead bodies and dug the trenches which formed the base of the funeral pyre; Ghaseras, who cut grass; Kalindis were cultivators and basket makers: Kauras, who breded pigs; Bansphors, who made bamboo baskets; Chapariyas, who made bamboo frames for roofs, and so on.<sup>12</sup> This led Risely to compare caste to an organism of the lower type which grows by fission or cell division.<sup>13</sup>

Another such example is that of Kahars. Kahars (palki-bearers) has several sub-castes. According to their legend, their main centre was Rampur near Gaya. However the two wives of the caste head quarreled so violently that one has to be sent to a place called Jaspur. The descendants of this branch consequently came to be known as Jaswars whereas those remaining at Rampur came to be known as Ramanis or Rawanis. And it is the Ramanis who stand first in caste hierarchy of the Kahars. Other were dhurias (boatmen and

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12. C.J.O. Donnel, op.cit, Also Subsequent Census Papers

13. Diwakar, R.R., op.cit, p. 688.

fishermen), the dhimars (palanquin bearers)'; turhas (vegetable sellers); kharwars (thatchers); garaur as, Bisarias and Maghiyas.<sup>14</sup>

### Caste Composition

About thirty castes were present in almost every part of the state. Besides Brahmin and Bhoomihars, others prominent among them were Gwallas, Barhis, Barais, Chamar, Chobis Doms, Lohar, Kahar, Kandus, Kayastha, Mallah Mali, Hajjam, Sunar, Telis, Baniyas, Pasis, Koeris, Dusadh, Mushhars, Dhanuk, Tanti, Kumhar etc. In 1931, the percentage distribution of twenty two Hindu caste and one Muslim in sixteen districts of Bihar was as follows :

Name of castes the Population	Percentage of Population	Total
1. Gwalla (Gope) B.C.	10.78	3,07,47,166
2. Brahmin U.C.	4.74	
3. Rajput U.C.	4.27	
4. Koeri B.C.	4.20	
5. Dusadh S.C.	4.17	
6. Chamar S.C.	4.05	

table contd...

14. Risley, H.H The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Vol. I p.370.

Name of castes		Percentage of the Population	Total Population
7. Kurmni	B.C.	3.36	
8. Julaha	M.	3.01	
9. Babhan (Bhoomihar)	U.C.	2.89	
10. Teli	B.C.	2.77	
11. Mushars	S.C.	2.32	
12. Dhanuka	B.C.	1.77	
13. Kahar	B.C.	1.66	
14. Tanti	S.C.	1.66	
15. Kandu	B.C.	1.64	
16. Mallaha	S.C.	1.49	
17. Hajjam	B.C.	1.40	
18. Kumhar	B.C.	1.32	
19. Kayastha	U.C.	1.15	
20. Baniya	B.C.	1.04	
21. Dhobi	S.C.	0.82	
22. Pasi	S.C.	0.55	
23. Dom	S.C.	0.41	
Total No. of castes 23.		Total percentage 61.47	

(Source:- Census 1931 Vol. VII Bihar and Orissa part II P.P. 136-139, quoted in Shashi Shekhar Jha's - political Elite in Bihar, p.20).

Apart from this thirty one castes and tribes were treated as depressed classes. They were Bauri, Dhobi, Gokha, Keld, Mushahars, Turi, Bogla, Dom Halkhor, Kuraria, Nat, Bhiya Dusadh, Hani, Labhegi, Pan, Bhunji, Ghasi, Pika, Mahuria, Pasi, Chamar, Chururia, Kandro, Margan, Rajmar, Chaupal, Godra, Kanjar, Modhi, Sial etc. <sup>15</sup>

The principal castes engaged in production of fabric and dress stuffs were the Jolahas and the weaver caste known as Tantwa or Tanti, a functional group developed under the pressure of the natural demand for woven cloth. The Dhuniyas were the cotton carder, the Rangrej were the dyers and the Laheris made the lac bengles, the Churihans were also bangle makers, and the patwa made fancy silk strings and fringes. <sup>16</sup>

Numerous caste prepared food and drinks. Gwallas were dealers of curd and milk. <sup>17</sup> Chicks were butchers, Telis were oil-pressers, Kandus were grain-parchers; Halwais were confectioners, the Pasis were the tappers of palmira

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15. Census of India - 1931, Bihar and Orissa, Part II, p.171.

16. Folk Songs Sung in Bihar even today refers to these.

17. Home Political, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, Fl. No. 79/1921.

and date - palm trees, and sold toddy; the Sunrise were manufacturers and vendors of country liquors and the Kallas and Kalwars were distillers and liquor sellers; the Chamars were the village tanners; while the Dabgaras made skin or leather-vessels used for ghee, oil, country saddles and the like; the Barahis were the carpenters. Those castes who worked in bamboos were the Turis, Karangas (or Bangars) and Doms. Other bamboo workers were the Mahalis, who were a Dravidian caste of workers, or labourers, and palanquin bearers, who were originally the inhabitants of Chotanagpur. The Barais made the leaf-plates used at Hindu ceremonies and festivals, and also make and carry torches. Among workers in minerals may be mentioned Nuniyas or saltpetre-maker, Sonar or gold smith, Lohar or black smith, Thathera and Kasera (also called Kansaris and Kansabanik) or brazier and the potter.<sup>18</sup>

#### Commercial castes

The chief commercial castes were Agrawalas, Agraharis and Baniyas. Among Agrawalas, the largest population was engaged in Banking, trade, petty lending and similar pursuits. A few were zamindars and holders of large tenures,

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18. Bengal District Gazetteers, 1907, 1909, Monghyr, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga.

but in most cases their connection with land may be traced to a profitable mortgage on the estate of a hereditary landowner. The poorer member of this caste had their employment as brokers, servants, and workers in gold and silver embroidery, and except agriculture, they were found in any work though not in that of the depressed castes. The Agraharis were another trading caste, among whom the women were not secluded as among the Agrawalas. Their womenfolk used to take part in the business of their husbands by selling rice, flour etc. Their business was generally that of tradesmen rather than that of bankers.<sup>19</sup>

Among petty traders, there were Rauniyars, and various Baniya groups dealing in cloth and grain; the Tamboli and the seller of betel-leaf and the Kanjara or grain-grocer.

### Brahmins

The Brahmins were incharge of religion and therefore commanded a respectable position which was and still is generally shown to the priests. They performed religious ceremonies for upper caste Hindus as well as of those Brahmins who being engaged in other pursuits were unable to

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19. Ibid, 1906, 1907, 1915, Patna, Gaya, Shahabad, Monghyr.  
L.S.S. O'Malley, Bihar District Gazetteer, Patna, 1924,  
p.51



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attend their own spiritual needs without the aid of someone specially skilled in Shastras.<sup>20</sup> All Brahmins, however were not priests. Many castes had their own. Some priests were also recruited from the monastic orders. Some Brahmins supported themselves on what they received during holidays and festivals from families under their spiritual care. Gifts to temples of houses, lands, ponds, orchards, and so on in perpetuity also formed a means of support to the priests in charge. In return the donors accepted worship of the God in the respective temples on their behalf.<sup>21</sup> Some Brahmin earned their living by teaching Sanskrit. Astrological predictions, the pointing out of auspicious and inauspicious days on the basis of the position of heavenly bodies and the reading of the palms also formed a good source of income. Thousands of Brahmins maintained themselves by merchandise and farming and by acting as soldiers in the army and peons in government offices. Some Brahmins acted as dancing masters to girls dedicated to temples and others lived by cooking.<sup>22</sup>

20. Bengal District Gazetteers, Monghyr, Muzaffarpur, 1907, 1909.

21. Diwakar R.R. op.cit, pp.688-689.

22. Ibid, pp.692-693.

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The Brahmins, though still continued to be objects of veneration and received generous gifts from the common people, had lost by this time much of the unqualified reverence which they had once claimed and received. Even Prof. Wilson admitted that invitations and presents to Brahmins during ceremonial rites and festivals were due not to the love that people bore for earning and intellectual eminence, but on account of their character and office.<sup>23</sup> In the world trade, commerce and business, the Brahamana had entered the field on the same footing as others, and no preference was shown because of his birth. Some Saraswat-Brahmins in Bihar were landholders, a few were wholesale merchants while others officiated as priests for royal families. The Kanyakubja, acted as teachers, priets, cultivators, soldiers, messengers, clerks and accountants, traders or cooks.<sup>24</sup>

The Babhana had always been a large and influential caste in Bihar. They had Brahmanical gotras and were in possession of much landed property. Among the literary classes, Kayastha ranked first. Clerical work was believed to be the original and characteristics occupation of this

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23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., p.693.

caste and an illiterate kayastha was looked upon as a creature which did not justify his existence. Kayasthas were not only in clerical pursuit but also in business management. The estate tehsildars and patwaris were also almost invariably Kayasthas.<sup>25</sup>

### Kayasthas

Kayasthas were in possession of considerable zamindars and tenures of subsequent values, while considerably few of them were among the lower grade cultivators. During those days they formed the majority of school teachers. Medical practitioners were recruited from the Hindu vaidyas. The legal practitioners i.e pleaders and Mukhatars were mostly Bengalis and local Kayasthas. The Kayasthas formed the majority of lower grade practitioners and in the subtlety and skill which they frequently displayed was not unequal to the Bengalis, who formed the majority of higher grade - practitioners in Bihar. The pugnacious tendencies of the people and the pleasure which the landholding classes found in the excitement of litigation, gave ample employment to the legal practitioner and this profession was regarded as

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25. The literature of the time mentions this about Kayastha, like Renu Fariswar Nath - Maila Anchal, p.14.

Bengal District Gazetteers - 1907, Monghyr, Purnea.

one of the easiest means of acquiring a good social position, a competence and with good fortune, wealth.<sup>26</sup>

The Kayasthas position in the hierarchy of caste system was that of the Shudras. Since they did not fit in the traditional varna system as upper caste and those castes having no sanction according to varna system used to put in the lowest position like the Shudras.<sup>27</sup> Many speculations about the origin of the Kayasthas were prevalent. One logical analysis was given by Dr. R.S. Sharma according to which -

The constant transfer of land revenues made by princes to priests, temples and officials led in early medieval times to the rise and growth of the scribe or the Kayasthas community. A large number of writers or record keepers had to be employed to draft documents of assignment of land and to maintain records of the land and villages and of gradually increasing items of revenue which were given in grants. The beginning of fragmentation of land on account of the laws of partition of the landed property -from Gupta times made the maintenance of details of individuals plots

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26. Ibid.

27. Rajkumar Lal VS. Visheshwar Dayal, 1884 Indian Law Reports, Vol. X, Calcutta, p.688.

necessary. Therefore village and land recorders had to be carefully maintained in order to avoid and settle land disputes which arose frequently. This whole work was done by a class of writers - who were known by various names such as Kayasthas, Karna etc.<sup>28</sup>

In the beginning Kayastha formed only one class of about a dozen kind of writers and record keepers. In course of time all other record keepers came to be known as Kayasthas. In the initial stage, literate members from the higher varnas were recruited as Kayasthas or scribes to meet the fiscal and administrative needs of the community but gradually the scribes from different varnas came out of marriage and other social connections with the parant varnas and confined all the social intercourse to the new community. They practised class endogamy and family exogamy. Faced with the problem of finding a place for the Kayasthas in the varna system, the Brahman law-givers fell into a dilemma and connected them with both Shudras as well as Dwijas. Since the Dharmshashtra texts of the origin of the Kayasthas are ambiguous and historical examples do not confined to one

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28. R.S.Sharma, Social Change In Early Medieval India, Delhi 1969, p.8-9.

varna; in recent times the Calcutta high court called them Brahmins.<sup>29</sup>

### Bhumihar

Among all the upper castes in Bihar during the nineteenth and twentieth century, Bhumihars or Babhans were the most dominant in many respects. Being the traditional landholders of Bihar, their numerical strength was also the high.<sup>30</sup> Most of the big zamindars of Bihar namely Bettiah, Amanawa, Hathwa, Tekare, Maksudpur, Madhuban, Sursand etc. were under Bhumihars. One thing interesting about this caste was that while there were some family big zamindars among the Bhumihars, the large majority constituted the upper middle and the rich peasants. Traditionally the caste was regarded as of mixed descent and various legends were found popular to its genesis. According to one account, the Brahmins on the Nepal frontier - being unaccompanied by their wives and children formed connections with the women of Kshatriya caste, and this offspring became Babhanas. Another legend states that Raja Shiv Singh of Darbhanga

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29. Ibid.

30. Census of India, 1891 Vol. V, Calcutta 1893.

performed a great religious sacrifice and invited 10,00,000 Brahmins to attend the ceremony. It so happened that the number of Brahmins assembled fell short of the requisite number by half. In order to make up the number, the Raja had to get in people of other castes. These men received the same homage as the Brahmins and in addition the sacred thread of the twice born. This gave umbrage to the genuine Brahmins and in order to make a genuine distinction between them, the Raja gave them the name Babhana.<sup>31</sup>

The Babhanas were also thought as a changed form of Brahmins who took to military profession. Sometimes they were called zamindar Brahmins or landlod Brahmins too.<sup>32</sup> Much earlier Buchanan called them as zamindar Brahmins i.e. landlord Brahmins.<sup>33</sup>

### Backward Castes

Among the backward castes the Gwallas or Ahirs were the

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31. A brief History of Tekari Raj, Calcutta 1880, p.62.
  32. J.A. Bourdillon, Report on the Census of Bengal, 1881, Vol. II, Calcutta 83, p.76.
  33. Francis Buchanan - Accounts of the Districts of Bihar and Patna, Vol. I, p.325.

Hara Prasad Shashtri - 'Babhan' published in Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal Vol. LXXI, part I - pp.61-62.

single largest caste in Bihar.<sup>34</sup> In 1931, their population was 3,455,144. Traditionally, their hereditary occupation was cattle rearing mainly cows and buffalows and selling ghee and milk. They were herdsmen and few took to agriculture also.<sup>35</sup> Later, they began calling themselves the descendants of yadu and hence, took the surname of 'yadava'. They became yaduvansi Kshatriyas. They held that they had regal traditions and had ruled over parts of the country since the pre-historic days and that Lord Krishna belonged to their community. During the medieval time there became current a fallacious theory that there were only two varnas - Brahmins and Shudras in Kaliyug. That is why, a number of castes belonging to the Kshatriya varna were placed in the Sudra varna. Ahris or Gwallas were the victims of this fallacious theory.<sup>36</sup> After the Muslims and the European invasions, the Ahirs politically declined. They had republican traditions so they were not consequently reduced to small principalities or zamindari castes. They took to cultivation, animal husbandry and trade in milk and milk products. But they retained their militancy.<sup>37</sup>

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34. Census of India, 1891, op.cit.

35. Bengal District Gazetteer - op.cit

36. Dr. Rajbali Pandey - Yaduvans Ka Itihas, p.4.

37. Ibid., p. 21.



### Caste and Occupation

The caste structure in Bihar was very much according to the economic and educational pattern during those days. In almost all the districts of Bihar, agricultural pursuit was the greatest engagement of 76.4% of the total population, Remainder 6.2% on industry and the professional classes accounted for 0.7%. The commercial class was very small, amounting to only 0.5% of the total inhabitants.

According to the census of 1901, in Distt. Monghyr 66.5% of the population were supported by agriculture, 13.6 percent by industries, 1.1 percent by commerce and 1.6 percent by the various professions. Of the agricultural population, 42.1% were actual workers, and these included 8,000 rent receivers, 420,000 rent payers and 148,000 labourers. Of the industrial population 15 percent were actual rent payers and workers including 14,000 cow and buffalows keeper and milk sellers, 8000 vegetable and fruit sellers, 7000 grocers, 8000 cotton weavers etc.<sup>38</sup>

Regarding whole of Bihar, the following table shows the occupational pattern during last decades of 19th century.

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38. Bengal District Gazetteer, Monghyr, op.cit.

### Occupational Pattern

Occupation	No. of people engaged
Government Service	244208
Pasture and Agriculture	16654585
Personnel Service	1013125
Preparation and supply of material substances	3230772
Commerce, Transport and Storage	609623
Professionals	345783
Infinite & Independent	4995417
Total	26093613

Source : Compiled from census of India, 1891, Vol.IV, Calcutta, 1893, pp.647-692 & pp.713-772.

### Caste Taboos

Several taboos related to caste system were prevalent in all over India. The taboo on taking food cooked by a person of at any rate lower, even if not of any other, caste was probably the Keynote of the whole system. Though it was not uncommon in some parts of India for a man of one caste to keep concubine of a lower caste or even a non-Hindu and he was not outcasted by his caste fellows on that ground, though he might be and often was, on the ground that he had

eaten food cooked or served by her or taken water from her hands.<sup>39</sup> This taboo, it seems, further generated the taboo on marriage in a natural way.

Caste taboos were varied between one locality and another. As for example, in Northern India, there were a number of Shudra castes from which men of higher castes could take water whereas in southern and western India the higher caste at any rate would, as a rule only take water from men of their own caste or a caste higher than their own. Ganges water was, on the contrary, could be taken from any caste, even from untouchables, as it was believed saw and beyond pollution. In Bihar Brahmin could take water from a Gwalla, but not in Bengal. A Brahmin or any man from good caste was forbidden in Bengal to drink water from the hands of any women who has not taboo spot, though this taboo was breaking down in 1883.<sup>40</sup>

Restrictions regarding eating were more severe than drinking wherein cooking was very, important rather than supply of food stuffs of strangers shadow or even a glance

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39. L.S.S. O'Malley - Indian Caste Customs, p.64.  
Blunt E.A.H. The Caste System of Northern India. 1931, pp.1233-124.

40. Hutton J.H., op.cit, p.71.

by a cow caste man, falling on cooking pot could necessitate throwing away the contents. Some castes did not take food from their own daughters, once these daughters, were married. In West Bengal a Kurmi prohibited the food cooked any Brahmin except his own guru, and his wife did not take the food her husbands's gure cooked.

Some extreme crisis regarding taboos are also found. Some of the lowest in Hindu Society. Were more particular than many high ones; A Kuricchan of Malabar plastered his house with cowdung if it was polluted by the entry of a Brahmin.<sup>41</sup>

There were numerous other taboos related to dress and dress and ornament, language, education etc. Specific taboos were asociated with particular occupations, like taboo on the pan cultivations of the Bauri caste, which the owner may not enter without bathing and purification and which the Brahmin may not set foot in at all, or like the impurity which attaches to the potters oven or the taboo which the Let sub caste of Bagdi place on bamboo fishtraps, which they will not use although they fish with nets; or the Sarak

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41. M.S.Aiyangar, Tamil Studies. p.91.  
H.H. Risely, op.cit, pp.72-73.

caste place on the use the word meaning 'to cut'.<sup>42</sup>

Sometimes these occupational restrictions were purely an outcome of our economic viz. The sonars of a district in the central provinces had a feast at which the castemen took the oath that they will not reveal the amount of alloy decided to be mixed with gold by the sonars on pain of being outcasted.<sup>43</sup>

During those days caste seemed to be capricious in its inhibitions and taboos. A Hindu might not allow his child to eat with a Muslim, Christian, or European, but he would allow him to attend a school taught by the latter. The Sakal Dwipi Brahmins prohibited the parboiled rice, but they used to eat grain parched by a Kandu or baked bread or any thing fried in ghee by a shudra. Solid food if wetted and oiled and passed through the hands of inferior caste people was looked upon a impure, but was eaten, if perfectly dry. With regard to cloth, silk and vegetable fibre such as jute were not made impure by the touch of inferior castes but cotton cloth was. A Brahmin physician did not read the pulse of a Shudra withoug wrapping his hand in silk.<sup>44</sup> Likewise hide

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42. J.H. Hutton, op.cit, p.87.

43. O'Malley, op.cit, pp.134-135.

44. Diwakar R.R., op.cit, pp.689-690.

and leather were impure but the skins of tigers and antelopes were not. Caste was not lost if a Hindu committed theft or forgery but it was lost if he was transported beyond the seas. The Gareris were working as domestic servants but they refused to carry bathing water for their masters and to rinse their clothes after they had bathed. The meat used for the morning sacrifice was the perquisite of Brahmins and some shudra castes, but everything in the evening belonged to the Bhuinmalis.<sup>45</sup>

Strong prejudices existed during the period against certain things as part of caste taboos. Among Brahmins, a few sections abstained from eating meat and eggs as also all bulbous roots such as onions or vegetables which assumed the shape of mushrooms. Beef has for centuries been looked upon with extreme horror by Hindus but pork and buffalo meat were one's own or a superior caste, otherwise it was contaminated. If cooking was done in the open, food kept in a circle smeared, with a mixture of cowdung and water was considered pure. There were restrictions also on smoking and drinking water. There was no social intercourse between high and low castes. Men of different castes would not walk together along

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45. Ibid.

the same road, not sit on the same mat, beside each other under the same roof and sometimes even in the same sheet. No shudra could live in a Brahmin quarter. Expulsion from a caste meant abstaining from eating, drinking, smoking, marrying or holding social inter-course with the person expelled. This punishment was inflicted on those who brought disgrace on the caste by unchastity, journeying to foreign countries across the sea, eating prohibited food, cohabiting with low caste women and dealing in prohibited things such as cowhides.<sup>46</sup> The penalty was regulated more by an arbitrary ceremonial code and administered by the caste organisation<sup>47</sup> rather than by the commonly accepted laws of morality. Great commandments might be broken, but the infringement of some trivial customs, even unintentionally, would involve a penalty. Expulsion or excommunication was the most severe of all the punishments. The expelled person cut off from his own caste folk, but he did not in any case become alien. He met with much the same treatment as before, so far as the general public was concerned. There was a full-fledged procedure for the re-admission of such persons into caste. Sometimes descendants of such persons formed a different subcaste when the expulsion was final. The

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46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

facility for an expelled person to rejoin his caste depended much on the friendly relations which existed between him and the influential members of the caste.<sup>48</sup>

The state did not interfere or try to control the internal affairs of castes, so castes governed themselves. The higher castes had, as a rule, no controlling agency as such and there was no constituted authority to hear complaints and pass judgements. In Purnea, in the early nineteenth century the higher castes had panchayats of their own, presided over by the most learned and wealthy persons in the neighbourhood. A Brahmin generally assisted at the assemblies of Kshatriyas and Kayasthas. In Patna and Shahabad, Brahmin assemblies were called 'Samooch'. No chief was recognised among the Kayasthas and other higher castes.<sup>49</sup>

Among the lower castes, there were an organised system of caste government. The unit consisted of a Chatai which literally meant a mat. It connoted those who had the right to sit together at a caste council meeting. The area to which a Chatai corresponded depended on the strength of the caste in a particular locality. Each Chatai had a standing

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48. Ibid, p.690.

49. Ibid.



committee consisting of one two or three functionaries. In South Bihar, the headman was called the Sardar. The vice-president called the Charidar, acted as the Sardar's messenger. It was his duty to convene panchayat and he was responsible for the execution of its decrees. In some panchayats, these officers held office by hereditary right, in others, they were elected for life. These posts were coveted as they carried prestige and authority.

In north Bihar, the head of the panchayat of unit was called a Mandal. A number of Mandalas were headed by a Sardar whose secretary was known as Barek or Diwan and over and above them was the Baisi. With the progress of time, the Sardar was becoming obsolete.<sup>50</sup>

In some parts, caste officials were given recognised fees or perquisites. In Purnea the tricumarate of Dusadhs received presents of clothes. The Gola Raja, who presided over panchayats got clothes and one rupee. Among other castes, presents were made at the time of a marriage. The Chharidar used to get a commission of one or two annas on the amount he collected. Among the chamars of Banka, the Sardar used to get one-fourth of the panchayats income, the

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50. Ibid, p.691.

rest being spent on feasts. Among the Bhars of Shahabad, there was a headman in every village called the Mangan whose office was elective. The Hajjams of Patna had two hereditary officers called the Sardar and the Chharidar.<sup>51</sup>

Besides breaches of castes rules and etiquette, cases of adultery, seduction and elopement were also disposed off by panchayats. In dealing with caste affairs, caste tribunals frequently encroached upon the jurisdiction of civil and criminal courts. The punishment awarded in such cases were briefly - (1) outcasting, whether temporarily or permanent. (2) Fines, (3) feasts to castemen, (4) Corporal punishment and (5) among the better classes prayaschitta.<sup>52</sup>

Among all these castes the Gwallas and the Bhumihars were numerically stronger than other castes. According to 1989 census the Gwallas had the maximum population of 31,40,605. After them Babhan were the second most numerous caste and their population was at that time 12,09,408. The Brahmins were the third most numerous, with a population of 12,00,269, a few thousand less than the Bhabans.

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51. Ibid, p.692.

52. Ibid.

Regarding the ritual status and dominance, the Brahmin were the first and foremost among all the castes. While because of the zamindari system, Bhumihar and Rajput zamindars had established a thoroughgoing political and economic control in the country side. Regarding literacy and education, in 1889 Brahmins were more dominant both in the English and other languages. They were followed by the Kayasthas and then came the Rajputs. The Rajputs dominated the learning of English after the Brahmins and were much ahead of the Kayasthas in that respect. But regarding the learning of other languages, Kayasthas were ahead of Rajputs after the Brahmins.

But in 1931, the situation was different. Though Gwallas still continued to be the most numerous caste followed by Brahmins, the population of Bhumihars decreased drastically. The economic dominance of Bhumihars and some Rajputs remained more or less the same but in education and learning, the Kayasthas surpassed the Brahmins. By 1931 31.81% of Kayasthas were literate where as only 19.5% of the Brahmins, 13.6% of the Bhumihars and 12.6% of the Rajputs were literate. The Brahmins could not as they did in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, establish any runaway lead over the non-Brahmins in taking to modern education and professions.

## CHAPTER 2

### CASTE ASSOCIATIONS AND CASTE CONSCIOUSNESS

The late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries were marked by the rise and growth of caste consciousness in Bihar. While English education was the prime factor in creating caste consciousness among the upper castes. The reason for the same was different for the same among the lower castes. This was the time when interest in the origin of castes was manifested and numerous caste Mahasabhas came into existence. It started with the Kayasthas and rapidly it encompassed all the castes in Bihar.

During those days, the English educated Bihari Hindu intelligentsia consisted mainly of the Kayasthas<sup>1</sup>. Table No. 1 gives the population of a number of selected castes and the progress of education among them during the last decade of nineteenth century.

It is evident from the table that the Kayasthas were prominent among receiving modern education. Since they

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1. Census of India 1931, Bihar and Orissa Vol. VII, Part-II.

were the traditional scribes without much landed property, the decline of Muslim courts and importance of persian forced them to learn English in order to get jobs in government offices. It was this caste which actually faced educational unemployment.

TABLE 1

Population of selected castes and the progress of education among them in 1981

Caste	Population	Learning	Literate in English	Other Languages
Bhumihar	12,09,400	8,995	852	73,215
Brahmin	12,00,269	25,080	4463	1,48,175
Chamar	10,01,066	883	40	3,313
Dusadh	11,60,521	660	190	4,259
Gwalla	31,40,605	3,545	289	27,359
Kayastha	3,89,585	17,620	686	85,969
Koiri	11,74,625	2,817	116	21,354
Kurmi	11,27,324	5,148	276	8,447
Rajput	11,69,407	11,743	1,073	81,830
Dom	1,59,971	157	9	456

Source: Compiled from Census of India 1891, Vol V, Calcutta 1893.

In securing jobs in government offices and educational institutions as well as in getting admissions to schools and colleges, they faced tough competition from Bengalis. Since, in profession, Bengalis were entrenched<sup>2</sup> it was felt that to avail themselves of the opportunities of employment, there must be separate province for Biharis.<sup>3</sup> Till 1911 Bihar was a part of the province of Bengal with Calcutta as capital. From 1836 to 1911, for about seventy-five years, it had no separate existence as a province.

The Demand 'Bihar for Biharis' was made for the first time in February, 1876, and it was demanded that instead of Bengalis, Biharis should be employed in Bihar and much more so, in the department of education.<sup>4</sup> The leadership of the movement was provided mostly by the Kayasthas because they not only were the traditional literates but also had the benefit of modern education. The leaders of the movement were Sir Sacchidanand Sinha, Sri Mahesh Narayan, Sri Nand Kishor lal, Sri Parmeshwari Lall, Rai Bahadur Krishna Sahay, Sri Bhagwati Sahay etc. The Bihar times edited by Sri

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2. Bengal Distt. Gazetteers, Muzuffarpur, Purnea, 1905, 1906, 1911.
  3. Anugrah Naryan Singh Mere Sansmaran pp. 1-3, (Hindi).
  4. V.C.P. Chandhari The creation of Modern Bihar pp. 28-29.

Mahesh Narayan became the mouthpiece of the movement. A fierce controversy raged between the leaders of the movement and educated Bengalis who were opposed to the idea of a separate Bihar province.<sup>5</sup>

Bihar and Orissa as a separate province came into existence in April, 1912. The creation of a separate province opened up new venues of employment and created the need for educational development. With the establishment of Patna University in 1917 new colleges and schools came into being.<sup>6</sup>

The people belonging to other castes also began to take advantage of the new opportunities for higher education and employment. The establishment of a high court at Patna and the creation of a provincial secretariate opened up new prospects for the English knowing people. Now, they could get preference in matters of employment, promotion and admission to educational institutions. They aired their grievances and pressed for more jobs in Bihar Legislative Council.<sup>7</sup>

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5. Mahesh Narayan & Sacchidanand Sinha : The Partition of Bengal or the Separation of Bihar, Patna pp. 104-109.
  6. Diwakar R.R. : Bihar through the ages pp. 718-723.
  7. Proceeding of the Legislative councils of the Lt.Governor of Bihar & Orissa, 1913 and onwards.

The decline in the prosperity of the zamindars and rich peasants (mainly belonging to the Bhumi-har and to some extent the Rajput Castes) as a result of the division and fragmentation of property drove them increasingly to English education as a means of improving their lot. A confidential report on the economic condition of Bengal in 1891 showed that the land-owning class had begun to decline. Speaking of the Patna division (comprising the present divisions of Patna and Tirhut), The report said: "They are very numerous in this division, and generally have a minute share in a landed estate, on which it would be impossible to support life. Hence they throng our high schools and gain a smattering of English, in the hope of obtaining some governmental post....This process is at work in the central and western districts and in western Bihar and its outcome is a yearly swelling class of hungry malcontents. Their disappointed hopes find an echo in the utterances of the native press and of the professional agitators."<sup>8</sup>

While, during the later part of the nineteenth and early part of twentieth centuries the movement for separate province was in its way progressing further, several caste associations emerged in Bihar like those of Kayasthas,

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8. Quoted by B.B. Mishra, on The Indian Middle Class pp.276-277.



Bhumihars etc. These associations took up the issues related to the problems of their respective castes and it made efforts to bring the members of their respective castes together to fight for their demands and for reforming the ill caste practices etc. Therefore, they became early expressions of caste-consciousness. The latter activities of the associations contributed to the further growth of caste-consciousness.

One of the earliest caste associations was those of the Kayasthas. The leaders of this association were Sacchidanand Sinha, Parmeshwar Lal and most of the leaders involved in the movement for separate Bihar. The basic object of the Kayastha association was to secure maximum benefit from the new opportunities, particularly by way of jobs. At that time, recruitment for the subordinate officers of the province like Assistant Commissioners, Deputy Collectors, Tehsildars, Talukdars were done mostly from the Indians.<sup>9</sup> So major effort was geared towards spread of education. One of the chief object of the association was to find a respectable place in the caste hierarchy because Kayastha compared to the rest of the upper castes had

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9. Low. D.A. : Introduction, The Climatic Years 1917-1947 in low (ed) Congress and the Raj.

rivalled the Brahmins in everthing connected with pen.<sup>10</sup>  
The educated leaders also felt it necessary to remove those customs and barriers which either hindered the pursuits of educated people or were source of division inside the caste. The political combition of some leaders like Sacchidananda Sinha was also one of the factors and that is why Sinha moved to Bihar from Uttar Pradesh in 1906.

Though the Kayasthas were the leaders of the movement for the separation of Bihar from Bengal and educationally and politically, the most advanced caste, yet socially their position was much lower in the hierarchy. They were not recognised as one of the upper castes and very often Brahmins refused to take water from them. It was always tauntingly said that it was not clear as to which of the four varnas they belonged to Scriptures were quoted to prove that Kayasthas were Shudras, the lowest of the four varnas and that they were unreliable. The opponents of the Bihari Kayuasthas said many a thing to denegrade them. They ridiculed Sir Sacchidanand Sinha by utilizing a judgement of Calcutta High Court to prove that they were Shudras.<sup>11</sup>

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10. B.B. Mishra, op.cit., p. 54.

11. Indian Law Reports, 1884, Raj Kumar Lal vs Vishweshwar Dayal, Vol. X, Calcutta, pp.688.

Kayasthas tried their best to advance their position socially ie, by trying to move up in the social hierarchy. Caste Associations viz. Kayastha sabahs were founded throughout Bihar. In Nov 1899, a Kayastha conference was held at Bankipur (Patna). It was attended by Five Thousand Kayasthas and they voiced their grievances, namely non availability of jobs, lack of educational facilities and low social position. A number of journals like the kayastha Hitaishi from Darbahanga, the Kayastha Gazett and the Kayastha messenger were started and the Kayastha in situation established at Sasaram in Sahabad<sup>12</sup> The foundation of the famous "Kayastha Pathshalla" at Allahabad gave a great phillip to the movement of social upgrading.<sup>13</sup>

The Kayasthas of U.P. made common cause with their Bihari counterparts. They started discarding old customs and mode of living and took to the more orthodox Barhmanical customs and ceremonies, the sacred thread and Sanskrit learning. They got a number of books (for example Chitraguptautpatti Prakash, Kayastha Sanskara Parakash etc.)

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12. Sheo Nandan Sahay; Bengal Ka Itihas (Kaithi Script) p.190.

13. The Lucknow Correspondent of the Lehore Tribune (12 Jan. 1887); "Kayastha Pathshala flourishng in Allhabad.

published showing that they were descendants of mythical Chitrugupta the chief recorder of man's virtues and vices, who sprang up from the body of Brahma.<sup>14</sup> The Hindustan Review edited by Sir Sacchidanand Sinha carried a regular column devoted to the news from the Kayastha world.<sup>15</sup> The Kayastha Samachar of Allahabad which began as an Urdu language monthly in 1873, converted to an English monthly in 1899 and became. The Hindustan Review and Kayastha Samachar in 1905. In the 1899-1904 period. The journal was entirely taken up with caste agitation, the question of Riseley's ranking of castes, monthly installment of the Kayastha

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14. The prospectus of kayastha pathshala, issued by Kali prasad in 1877 "published in the kayastha samachar, Vol. 1. No.1, dated 23rd October 1873. in kayastha (Agra), I Jan-Feb 1887, p. 34 Murlidhar, "The Kayastha pathshala, p. 15. The second number of resolution was like this - "... Bihar where the chitra Gupata Vansi Kayasthas are to be still found in their original state." and Again in 1877-78, Kali prasad published the prospectus, which delineated the objects of the Kayastha pathshala as follows:-
1. That a large educational institution be published which may remain under the sole control of the Chitra gupta-vansi Chhatreya community and in which they may be at liberty to give such education to their members as they may think the best suited and useful to themselves.
- (L. Carroll p. 68 K (Agra), II Jan-Feb 1897, pp.33-34, Murlidhar, the Kayastha Pathshala pp. 14-15.
15. L. Carroll : Caste, Social Change and the Social Scientist. In Journal of Asian studies, November 1975, Vol. XXXV, No. 1. p.70.

Ethnology", and reports of district level caste meetings.<sup>16</sup>

Only a few years after the Calcutta High Court Judgments, the Allahabad High Court pronounced that the Kayasthas of North Western provinces and Awadh were Kshatriya.<sup>17</sup> Much later, in 1927, the Patna High Court followed the Allahabad High Court, saying that the Bihari Kayasthas were Kashtriyas or at last the twice born. The forty eight page judgement was written by Sir Jwalla Prasad with whom his English Colleague concurred. It is interesting to note that Sir Jwalla Prasad himself was Kayastha.<sup>18</sup> Kayasthas since then started taking increasingly the Surname Sinha. In the 1899 issues of the Kayastha Samachar, the elements of (1) Sanskritization (2) Western education and (3) National political integration were present.<sup>19</sup> In its every issue articles expressing pious hopes of attaining kshatriya status for kayasthas appeared.<sup>20</sup> Even under

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16. Moblity in Nineteenth Century Caste System "by William L. Rowe. In M. Singer and B.Cohn eds. Structure and Change in Indian Society, p. 204.

17. Tulsi Ram vs. Bihari lal (1890) Indian Law Reports Vol. XIII Allahabad, PP. 328-384, Full bench.

18. Ishwari Prasad Vs Rai Hari parasad, The Indian Law Report Patna series, Vol. VI 1927.

19. Mobility in the 19th C. Caste System, opcit p. 204.

20. Ibid ," page 205.

Sacchidanand Sinha, focus was given on Kayastha community, though along with a general record and review of Indian progress in all spheres of activity.<sup>21</sup>

Kayastha conferences were held in 1894 and 1901. The Kayastha conference continued to function within its historical context, to be influenced by and to reflect the social and political environment, from which it cannot be isolated. The 1920 and 1930 sessions of the Kayastha conference emphasised "Sanskritization" within the movement. For the first time the Kayastha conference seriously undertook to define and enforce an "orthodox system of ritual observances."<sup>22</sup> Though it was not, unusual for earlier conference to pass innocuous resolutions, such as that of the 1986 Dumaraon Session, where it was stated "that this conference urges upon the community the necessity of observing Dwijdharmi rites."<sup>23</sup> C.H. Heimsath Cites this

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21. Hindustan Review LIII, July 1929, p. I.  
The Journal now was not entirely taken up with caste agitation. (MNCCS, p. 204) In December 1900, a Bhagalpur correspondent wrote to the kayastha samachar complaining that a few pages only are devoted to the khayastha world." Sinha simply referred to the writer to the "prospectes," in which it was distinctly laid down that only some pages will be doveted to " The kayastha world" :- Kayastha samachar II Dec.1900 pp. 29-30.
22. Hindustan Review and Kayastha Samachar, XV, Jan.1907, p. 102
23. Ibid

resolution to document his statement that "A major purpose of the Kayastha conference and the various sabhas associated with it was to gain public acceptance of all Kayasthas as twiceborn."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the same conference passed two resolutions on sea voyage. One congratulating Panna Lal and Mahesh Narayan Sinha on their academic achievements abroad and thanking "those gentlemen of the community, who by sending their relatives to England, have given effect to the wishes of the Kayastha conference and the other establishing fund for sending one student a year to Japan for technical education."<sup>25</sup> Education abroad was most important in Kayastha conferences. Along with the emphasis on following orthodox character of ritual patterns, stress was given on uniformity. During this period, the Kayastha conference took cognizance of the cultural diversity within the Kayastha community and appointed a commission to investigate the observance of Samaskars by Kayasthas of different geographical areas and sub castes and make recommendations to ensure uniformity.

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24. C.H. Heimsath, Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform, princeton 1964, p. 281.
25. Hindustan Review and Kayastha Samacher, Jan. 1907, pp. 102-103. quoted in L. Carroll - op.cit, pp. 102-103.

The most "Sanskritic" Kayastha conference was that held in Patna in 1931 of the twenty resolution passed at this session, eight were concerned with formal or administrative matters, six dealt with economic and social issues: intermarriage of sub-castes; improvement in the condition of women; reduction of dowry; physical fitness; encouragement of trade and commerce; recognition of the social reform league. The remaining six resolutions were:

- The conference strongly enjoins upon every Kayastha to be duly initiated into the Gayatri and invested with the sacred thread and to conform to the rites of the Dwijas.

That all Kayasthas be requested to assist in the formation of Kayastha Chatra Niwas at Benaras by suitable donations.

That in all social functions Kayastha Pandits should be invited and honoured in the same way as Brahmins Pandits.

That the Government of Bengal be approached with the request to extend sanskrit scholarships and stipends to Kayastha students.



- That the Viceroy be moved with the request that the title of Mahamahopadhyaya be conferred on duly qualified Kayastha pandits as on pandits of Brahmins and other castes.
  
- In view of the fact that the observance of the period of purification after death (Asucha), the Upanayan Ceremony and other rites and customs observed by Kayasthas differs in different sections of the caste and in different localities, that a sub-committee consisting of the following gentleman be formed to investigate and report for ensuring uniformity of these practices and customs....<sup>26</sup>

The resolution above shows that the Kayastha conference movement contributed towards the Sanskrit emphasis of the period. A group of Kayastha Shashtris emerged from the Sanskrit departments of the universities, who were functioning within the Kayastha movement emphasised the Kayasthas to become more ritually orthodox, and the conference to recognize the efficacy of rites performed by

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26. Kayastha Samachar, June 1932, pp. 13-18 (This KS is a publication of K.P. Truett).

Kayastha pandits.<sup>27</sup>

Thus the caste associations of the Kayastha created an organisation with a community basis or in other words caste basis. The Kayasthas got united in the name of caste and measures were taken for the progress and advancement of the community. the pattern became ideal or ready made pattern for the other castes, especially the Bhumihars soon afterwards.

#### Bhumihar Association

The Babhan or the Bhumihars were the traditional land holders of Bihar. There were many big zamindars under the people from this caste and the percentage of landless persons among this community had been very small. During the early decades of this century, due to the partition of the zamindari and landed property,<sup>28</sup> the erstwhile landowners began to go to the urban areas to secure jobs. For their educational advancement, they received much encouragement and financial support from Sir Ganesh Dutta Singh, a leading lawyer and minister in the government of

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27. L. Carroll :op.cit, p.82.

28. J.A. Bourdillon, Report on the Census of Bengal, 1881 Vol I, Calcutta 1883 , pp. 137-139.

Bihar during those days, Sri Rajandhari Singh, a Zamindar, who being on the public service commission, helped them in getting jobs in the government, Sri Langat Singh a rich railway contractor who established the then Bhumihar Brahmin college at Muzaffarpur and many others of their own caste.<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding their economically powerful position in Bihar, the Bhumihars did not enjoy a higher position in the social hierarchy. A number of theories circulated about their origin. Most of them were not to their liking<sup>30</sup>.

A movement was started by the educated section of the caste to prove that it was really a sub cast of Brahmins. Till then this caste was known as Babhan. In almost all govt. records during the last century the term Bhumihar or Bhumihar Brahmin is absent. When the movement for upward social mobility was started. The Babhans began calling<sup>31</sup> themselves Brahmins or Bhumihar Brahmins or simply Bhumihars. The Director of Public Instruction U.P. was

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29. G. Mishra & B.K. Sahay - Socio Economic Roots of Castism in Bihar - pp. 164-165.

30. Jwala pd. Mishra - Varna Viveka Chandrika p. 86 & J.A. Bourdillon, op.cit : Vol. 1, Calcutta - 1883 p.76., L.S.S. O' Malley - census of India, 1911 Vol. V part I, Calcutta 1917, pp. 444-445.

31. W.C. Lacey, Census of India, 1931 Vol. VIII, part I, Patna, 1933 pp. 263 - 275.

persuaded to order that the Bhumihar School teachers be shown as Brahmins.<sup>32</sup>

The first Bhumihar Brahaman sabha was started in 1892 and gained momentum then afterwards. A deputation of the Bhumihar Brahaman Sabha of Mujaffarpur requested the Maharaja of Benaras to patronise the sabha in its effort to improve the educational status of the Bhumihars in general. He cordially received them and promised help. He also approved of holding a meeting of Bhumihar Brahmins at Banaras under his presidentship.<sup>33</sup>

The sabha passed resolution against the extravagant expenditure on marriages, at Muzaffarpur. The sabha emphasised on ameliorating the Backward condition of their castemen. Big zamindars subscribed heavy grants of money to the sabha, for its own maintenance and others as well. The sabha got encouragement from the wealthy Babhans. The attitude of British officials were sympathetic to the sabha, as the commissioner of Patna C.C. Stevens expressed his sympathy with the sabha.<sup>34</sup>

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32. Rajani Kant Shastri; Hindu Jati Ka Uthan Aur Patan, Allahabad, 1967 p. 50.

33. Bihar Herald, 28th Oct. 1899.

34. The Bihar Times, 28th January, 1898.

A journal of the sabha was started with its name Bhumihar Brahman.<sup>35</sup> In 1899, Bhumihar Brahmin Sabha emerged as the strongest caste association. It proposed to bring about a revolution in the social status of a caste ie. Bhumihars. The least number of the Bhumihars in govt. or private services was ascribed to the paucity of education. The noble example of Kayastha conference was cited to generate a community feeling.<sup>36</sup> Proposal for opening up of colleges was implemented. Lots of colleges, schools, hostels came into existence to provide facility for the Bhumihar students.<sup>37</sup>

These efforts proved fruitful and many B.A.S, B.L.S, also M.A.S, author of books, poets (like Ramdhari Singh Dinkar) Sanskrit and Persian Scholars, and so forth grew in this community.

The caste feeling among the Bhumihars encroached even in those who were involved with the struggle based on class, like the Kisan Movement. Swami Sahaja Nand Saraswati.

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35. Ibid.

36. The Bihar Times, 24th March, 1899, letters to the Editor.

37. The Bihar Times, 14th April, 1899, Letter to the Editor.

Who is called the father of Kissan Movement had a double role. On the one hand, he was a leader of the peasantry fighting against the landlords and the British government and declaring his faith in Marxism, on the other hand he left no stone unturned to prove that Bhumihars were Brahmins. He played a leading role in the annual session of Akhil Bhartiya Bhumihar Brahman Sabha, held at Ballia in Dec. 1914.<sup>39</sup> There he declared that the Bhumihars who took to agriculture rather than priesthood were superior Brahmins. According to him there was a general demoralization among the Bhumihars because of wrong the baseless progaganda about their origin. He toured U.P. and Bihar extensively and collected materials to write a four hundred page book Bhumihar Brahman Parichay.<sup>40</sup> He toured and lectured among his casteman upholding that they were Brahmins. His other books were "Brahman Samaj Ke Sthiti" "Jhootha Bhai aur Mithyabhiman etc."<sup>41</sup> He was a prominent pillar of the Bhumihar Brahman published from Benaras.

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38. The Bihar Times, 14th April, 1899.

39. The Biharee, 1914 December.

40. Bhumihar Brahman Parichay, 1916.

41. The situation of Brahman Society - by Swami Sahajanand and False Fear and False Pride by him only.

Later he revised his view and exhorted the Bhumihars to insist on conducting the religious rites. His so called Purohit Andolan started in 1924. He published a twelve hundred page book "Karma-Kalpa" in support of the movement. In 1926 the annual session of his caste unanimously supported his stand. The important supporter of Swamiji on this issue were Dr. S.K. Sinha, Sri Ramdayalu Singh, and Sri Dhanraj Sharma all prominent leaders of the Bihar Congress.<sup>42</sup>

L.S.S. O'Malley wrote in the census report - "The Bhumihars contended that they were and always had been Brahmins, and differed from those who were universally recognized as such in having taken to cultivation and given up the principal functions connected with priesthood, viz., officiating as priests in religious ceremonies, teaching the vedas and receiving alms. They claimed that, even at the present day, Maithili Brahmins who took to non-priestly occupations such as cultivation and seceded from their own on community were admitted among them. They also contended that many of their ceremonies were performed in the same manner and style and with the same Mantras, as

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42. Biharee, December 1926 and The Searchlight June 6 and January 1936.

those of Brahmins.<sup>43</sup>

An attempt was made by Bhumihars to marry Brahmin girls. They could succeed in establishing marriage relations with poor, Maithili Brahmins. Such Brahmin families were known as Dogamias. The phenomena was in greater evidence in the Districts of Bhagalpur and Purnea.<sup>44</sup> The Maithili Mahasabha took a serious note of the phenomena in its Bhagalpur session in 1911.<sup>45</sup>

This tendency to upward mobility on the part of Bhumihars resulted in the transfer of a significant chunk of the Bhumihar population to the fold of Brahmins. Consequently in 1931 census when the caste data were collected for the last time, the population of the Bhumihar community recorded an actual decrease of 8.5 percent during 1921-1931. According to census report, the loss sustained was unreal. It was caused by a wholesale transfer of Bhumihars to the Brahmins community. At first they pressed for the alternative designation of Bhumihar Brahmin and the

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43. L.S.S. O'Malley, op.cit, p.444.

44. Ibid and P.C. Tallents, Census of India, 1921 Vol VII, part I, Patna 1923, p.237.

45. Rajani Kant Shashtri, op.cit, p.50.



census authorities recognised their claim. Later at each successive census, determined and increasingly successful attempts were made by them to shed the qualifying epithet. Bhumihars were most numerous in five out of the six, districts of North Bihar, (excluding purnea) and the four South Bihar districts. The following Table shows the actual number of both the caste and a comparison with a generation earlier.

TABLE 2  
Number of Bhumihars and Brahmins in Nine Districts of Bihar  
in 1901 and 1931

District	Bhumihars		Brahmins		%age in total population	Variation Bhumihar population	(1901-1931) Brahmin population
	1931	1901	1901	1931			
Patana	106,743	113,655	58,566	38,849	+ 13.68	- 6.0	+ 50.756
Yaya	164,731	163,108	74,297	64,350	+ 15.84	+ 1.00	+ 15.43
Shasabad	61,176	82,334	199,544	207,071	+ 1.71	-22.61	- 3.64
Saran	95,422	106,098	176,875	184,322	+ 3.21	-10.06	- 4.0
Chaparan	56,161	52,453	91,941	84,949	+ 19.84	+ 1.35	+ 8.23
Muzaffar- pur	165,446	200,885	130,927	99,179	+ 6.71	-17.31	+ 32.01
Bhanga	49,062	154,345	321,382	197,967	+ 8.70	-68.21	+ 62.34
Munghyr	138,742	188,959	113,285	60,353	+ 10.48	-26.58	+ 87.70
Bhagal- pur	16,857	37,973	109,722	76,532	+ 6.97	-55.61	+ 43.37

Source: W.C. Lacey, Census of India, 1931 Vol. VII, Part I, Patna 1933, pp.274-275.

The process of transformation went to an extreme length in the District of Darbhanga where over a lac of Bhumihars had achieved this type of transformation Bhagalpur, Monghyr, Shahabad came next in order, but to a greater or smaller degree the same process had been going on in every district.<sup>46</sup>

In the beginning the caste sabha of Bhumihars, in Bihar was confined only to Big Bhumihar landholders. It championed their cause and could rightly be called the Bhumihar landholders Association. High-ups in the government of the day attended and addressed its annual sessions. It was a firm supporter of the British government.<sup>47</sup> Later when it came to be concerned more and more with the movement for social upgrading, it became broad based and its character changed. It became the champion of the cause of the landlords, the rich peasants, and the educated unemployed of the community. It became anti-British and almost all the Bhumihar congress leaders were connected with it and through it, they rallied to their caste men whenever the need arose.<sup>48</sup>

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46. W.C. Lacey, op.cit, pp.274-275.

47. Bihar Herald, 29th January, 1910.

48. Anugrah Narayan Singh, op.cit., Patna 'in Hindi', pp.110-111.

### Other Associations

The caste organisation of the other castes like Maithili Brahmins in 1899, Saryuparin Brahman Sabha in 1905, Rajput Sabha in 1906, Gaur Sabha in 1912 Came to the fore. Maithili Brahman organised themselves under the leadership of Darbhanga Raj and convened their Association in Darbhanga, Bhagalpur etc. The Rajputs organised under the leadership of few educated people<sup>49</sup> and claimed to be the direct descendants of the kshatriyas, as they were considered inferior to Kayasthas in purnea and Bhagalpur. They were considered inferior also to physcians and merchants.<sup>50</sup>

The caste consciousness spread among the lower castes too. Among them the backwards or the upper rank of the shudras were the first to think and start movements of their respective castes through castes organisations.<sup>51</sup> The first among them were the Kahars who started in 1906 Rawani Kahar Sabha. In 1911 Dusadh (an sc caste) came to organise their sabha and in 1912, Gope Jatiya Sabha, Kewat Sabha, Kurmi

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49. Ahmad and Jha J.S.; Ma

50. Diwakar R.R., op.cit., p.694.

51. Bihar and Orissa in 1922 (Supreintendent Government Printing), Bihar and Orissa Patna 1923, p.13.

Sabha and Nai Brahman Sabha etc. came into existence. A sub-deputy collector with considerable experience of conditions in Palamau district, himself a Muslim, contributed an account of social developments among various Hindu communities in that locality which derived special interest from the circumstance that palamau was one of the more backward areas of the province. He wrote -

"Among other old castes and sects of the district, there is indication of marked revival in Dusadh, Telis, Kahars, Kurmis, Koeris, Ahirs Dabgars, Kharwars, Rochabandhias, Gaurs and Chamars, who are all heart and soul trying to uplift their respective caste and sects, most of them by accepting the sacred thread to the Brahmins in three prabars or knots instead of five prabars of the higher castes of the Hindus. They are all returning to the Sanatana Dharma under the influence of the Brahmin priests, or imbibing the ideas of the Aryas, under their leaders residing in Gaya, Monghyr, Shahabad, Sasaram, Benaras and elsewhere.<sup>52</sup>

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52. Census of India, 1931, Vol. III, part I, p.268.

The Bhats claimed themselves to be Brahma Bhats (i.e. Subcaste of Brahmin) or simply Brahmins. Barahis an Lohar became Visvakarma - The chief architect of God. Hajiams called themselves Nai-Brahmins or Kulin Brahmins. Similarly Dusadhs, Kalwars, Koeries and Rawani Kahars<sup>53</sup> became Gahlot, Rajputs, Haihay Kshatriyas, Kushwaha Kshatriyas, Kurm Kshatriyas and Chandravansi Kshatriyas respectively.<sup>54</sup> The Belwars who were found in saran and champran also claimed themselves to be Brahmins. They were a small but wealthy community whose chief occupation was trade in cattle and foodgrains. According to them, they were Sandhya Brahmins and their name Belwar was a corruption of Bailwar meaning those who dealt in oxen.<sup>55</sup>

The strongest organisation among the lower castes was that of the Gwalas, whose agitation spread almost among all the district. A congress of Gwallas known as "Gop Jatiya Sabha" was called in April, 1923 where different schemes for the advancement of the caste were projected.<sup>56</sup>

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53. Risley, H.H. The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, vol. I p. 370 and Literature of the Time like Fanishwar Nath "Renu", Maila Anchal.

54. Risley, H.H. op.cit, p.370.

55. Diwakar R.R., op.cit., p.695.

56. Bihar and Orissa in 1923, p.7.

The District Magistrate of Muzaffarpur reported "The caste movement among the Gwallas due to insistence of their right to wear sacred thread was spreading in 1923."<sup>57</sup>

An All India Yadava Mahasabha was held at Purnea on 20th April, 1924, under the presidentship of Chaudhari Badan Sinha.<sup>58</sup> They began calling themselves the descendants of "Yadu and hence, took the surname Yadava. They became Yadvansiya Kshatriyas. They held that they were Kshatriyas during the days of Lord Krishna."<sup>59</sup>

The movement of lower castes for upward social mobility or movement by claiming the level of either Brahman or Kshatriyas was in essence the expression of their resentment against their pitiable socio-economic conditions. They discussed measures in their caste sabhas to obtain an increase in their wages and improve their social status.<sup>60</sup>

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57. The Searchlight, 28th April, 1924, 5,5.

58. Raj Bali Pandey - Yaduvana Ka Itihas, p.4.

59. Confidential File No. 298/19123, Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, Political Special Section, and Fortnightly Report to the Govt. of India, D.O. No. 8 CT, p.1.

60. Reports on Political Situation in Bihar and Orissa for the Month of Jan. and Feb., 1913.

At some places, the principal item in the programme was the abandonment of begar (forced unpaid labour) and other menial work.

The social and economic demands of lower castes were taken up by their respective Caste-Associations. For whatever social and economic reliefs could be got, The credit was largely to the different caste Association. Caste organisation helped their members get better educational facilities and better prices for their produce. Schools, colleges and hostels bearing caste labels and for the benefit of the casteman were established.

Before concluding this section a few words about caste association of upper castes will not be out of place. Their leadership generally was in the hands of the English educated people and supported by Zamindars. Some of them tried their best to make their caste Associations Pro-British and they received encouragement from the British government. The case of the lower castes' caste-organisation was different. The lack of education made them wedded to the belief in the caste system and they thought that their bad social, cultural educational and economic plight was due to their birth in lower castes. So they wanted to move upward

in the existing social framework. They accepted existing caste divisions and took it for granted that Brahmin and Rajputs were the upper caste people and therefore they were in better social and economic position. They thought once they came to be recognised as either Brahman or kshatriyas, their lot would automatically improve.

The formation of caste sabhas to advance the social status of the lower castes was a common phenomena. In most cases, the procedure was more or less uniform. A new name was selected for the caste, its members were adjured to adopt the sacred thread, and various resolutions were passed dealing with such questions as food and drink, the abandonment of begari, degrading occupations, postponement of the age of marriage, ban on widow marriage etc.

The later period saw the Gwallas as the most organised among the lower castes, who along with their claims for higher social status were ready to fight with the upper castes for their ends. The rise and growth of Gwalla movement will be discussed in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 3

### CASTE CONFLICT

One of the consequences of the process of the formation of caste associations and caste-consciousness described in the previous chapter was an emergence of tension between different castes. The reason for this tension were several; social economic and political. However the manner in which caste solidarity emerged during the early part of twentieth century contributed to the actual incidence of conflict. This chapter is an attempt to narrate and understand the caste conflict with particular reference to the Gwallas and the Bhumihars.

The Gwallas, as it is mentioned earlier were the most numerous caste in Bihar in the beginning of twentieth Century and even before. Even the census of 1931 shows that the percentage population of Gwallas in the total population of Bihar was at once more than the double in comparison to the other castes. The position of this most numerous caste in the caste hierarchy was that of the shudras. In almost all the census, from nineteen hundred and one to nineteen thirty one we find the place of Gwallas much below. As mentioned earlier, besides their hereditary occupation, the Gwallas were the tenants of the landholders, mostly the

Bhumihars. So, due to the tenant - Zamindar relationship the Gwallas had to supply milk and milk Products to the Zamindar houses and during the ceremonies or any special occasion this supply had to be more. In addition, they had to do 'Begari' for their Zamindars. This performance of begari as the most annoying thing for the Gwallas. Because of the Zamindari system, the Gwallas for grazing their cattles, and for their relationship as the tenants depended largely on the Zamindars. So, inspite of a hatred for begari, they had no other avenue to escape accordingly, they were forced to do what their Zamindars wanted.

The situation was changing with time and few from the Gwallas community started taking education. According to 1891 census, 3545 Gwallas were learning out of which 289 were in learning English and the number of those in learning other languages was 27,359 which was quite a considerable number and only three of the upper castes were above that. The impact of education though not very great provided a kind of psychological strength for them to see themselves not inferior or it may be said that became aware of that education was not the prerogative of the upper castes only as established by the traditional values.

The influence of the caste movements of upper castes for upward social mobility touched the Gwallas community too. As mentioned earlier, they began calling themselves the descendants of Yadu, and should taking surname 'Yadavas'. They claimed that they are Yaduvansi Kshatriyas and as it is mentioned in the Hindu religions scriptures, Lord Krishna belonged to the Yadava community. The connection which they proved, they had with Krishna, whom even Brahmins and all, worship, gave enormous moral strength to the Gwallas to claim their Kshatriyahood, as Krishna was, in the ancient religions text, the Kshatriya and Gwallas at the same time. They asserted that they had regal traditions and since prehistoric days they had ruled over parts of the country. Regarding their present status as those of Shudras, they had a theoretical explanation that because of a fallacious theory prevalent during medieval times, they were relegated to the Shudra Varna. More over the Muslim and British invasions caused their political decline. Because of the republican tradition which they had they couldn't achieve zamindaries or small principalities in legacy, and so they took to cultivation, animal husbandry and trade in milk and milk product. But they claimed that because of the fact that they were Kshatriya they are still militant.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Yaduvans Ka Itihasa - Rajbali Pandey, p.

The Gwalla movement first started in Patna in 1912 at Kankarbag. A huge gathering called the Gop Jatiya Sabha or Mahasabha was held under the leadership of Babu Damodar Prasad, a Gwalla landlord of Pacchima Darbaja - in Patna city. The resolutions were passed according to which abandonment of domestic services except of rearing cattles, wearing of sacred thread and ceremonial purity etc. were proposed. Other meetings were held at Dinapur, Munar and Mussaurhi, all different places in Patna District.<sup>2</sup>

The movement did not gain momentum or assumed any significance till after the war when it received a phillip by the starting of the Non-cooperation movement. Signs of the Gwalla movement in Bihar were first seen in Feb. 1921 in connection with some cases which were instituted against the Gwallas by some Mohammedan Zamindars who were in the habit of taking ghee, curd etc. from the Gwallas at rates lower than those prevailed in the Bazar. This the Gwallas resented and resolved not to supply the Zamindars any longer with commodities except at Bazar rates.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Home Political, Special Section, Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, fl. No. 79/1921.

3. Ibid.

This was the starting point of one of the strongest caste organisation of Bihar. That is of Gwallas. There were various factors for the rise and growth of Gwallas movement.

The separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal and developing of Patna as its capital with hectic political and administrative activities, led the people from different parts of Bihar to come to Patna for various administrative works and so on. Naturally the new markets tea-stalls, confectioner's shop etc. were opened. Since the traditional occupation of Gwallas was cattle-rearing, selling milk, curd and ghee, they got open market to sell their commodities. They earned more than they did before, because in market they didn't have to sell it at lower rates as with the zamindars. Thus the Gwallas in those years made good profit from their hereditary occupation and this naturally led to a desire to live better and to free their women folk from outdoor and hard manual labour.<sup>4</sup> In the Southern Patna, the material condition of Gwallas was very prosperous. AS mentioned above, there are instances which show that the zamindar of Patna city who presided over the first meeting

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4. Home Department, Political Special Section Feb. No 79/1921.

of Gwallas was himself a Gwalla.<sup>5</sup>

There were other factors too. The spread of English and other kind of education among the Gwallas was progressing, through very slowly. They were becoming exposed to modern education.<sup>6</sup> There was a change in attitude brought by modern education, against the established tradition of high and low, though it cannot be ascertained regarding the extent of change. The change was not much swift but still not insignificant.

The laxity of social and ceremonial caste rules which was noticeable among the higher castes also had an impact psychologically. The Brahmins lost much of the unqualified reverence which they had once claimed and received. In the world of trade, commerce and business the entrance of Brahmins was on the same footing as others, and no preference was shown because of his birth. It all depended on his skill and occupation which stood him in good stead. Some Saraswata Brahmin in Bihar were wholesale merchants. Some Kanyakubja were cultivators, soldiers, messengers,

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5. Home Political Special Section, Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, fl.No. 171/1925

6. Census of India, 1891, Vol. V, Calcutta 1893.

clerks and accountants, traders or cooks. The caste system was becoming less rigid regarding vocations. No body was tied down to follow his hereditary occupation. The ordinary pursuits and occupations of life were now thrown open to all in India as in England. There was nothing to prevent an ordinary shopkeeper from rising to a wealthy merchant, or a rich merchant from sinking to the position of a servant. Even a Mehtar (Scavenger) or Chamar, instead of being content with the menial offices to which he was born, could aspire to rise in the police and the army.<sup>7</sup>

The Brahmins now no way superior to cultural learnings or mental outlook and they could hardly command the respect or dictate the observance which their forefathers did.<sup>8</sup> So the backward castes lost the reverence for the ritual or traditional superiority of the upper castes, especially the Gwallas. Impact of other castes movement of social upliftment and their caste-gatherings in Patna and different parts of Bihar, and the claim by the Bhumihars of Brahminia or of the Kshatriyas Status by the Kayastahas were also significant. So the Gwallas tried to free themselves

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7. Diwakar R.R. Bihar Through Ages, p. 697.

8. Home Political Special Section, fl. No. 171/1925.

from the trammels of caste rules imposed long ago.<sup>9</sup> A general desire for social upliftment through following the upper caste customs accelerated among them and this gave birth to the Gwallas movement in Bihar.

The fortnightly report to the Government of Bihar and Orissa states - Another sign of the time is the growing caste consciousness among the upper rank of the Shudras. For some years past, the Gwallas the largest single caste in Bihar province and specially pride themselves with their relation with 'Krishna' has been continuing to improve their social position. The movement takes the form of Caste Associations, large annual as well casual and numerous small caste gatherings, The assumption on sacred thread, vows of temperance and refusal to performance 'Begari' and menial offices of upper castes or higher castes, who usually occupy the position of landlords.<sup>10</sup>

These manifestations were resented by the twice born castes, particularly by the Bhumihaar Brahmins, who saw in them a menace at once social and economic. But the Gwallas

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9. Ibid.

10. Fortnightly Reports, Govt. of Bihar and Orissa Patna, 1925-26.



were determined to reform their social status so as to bring themselves on a level a higher as that of the upper castes. In 1921, a meeting of the Gwallas in Patna city was held, wherein 1600 Gwallas attended. Through their resolutions they requested the government to stop the oppression by the zamindars. They stated in their petition that in several districts of Bihar province, differences between the Zamindars and Gop-Jatiya had arisen over th 'Begari' question, over which the Gwallas had been oppressed by the Zamindars and in many circumstances like this many lives were lost in several places. The Gwallas lives were lost in several places. The Gwallas also promised not to create any trouble or disturbance when their zamindars will ask 'Begari' from them, rather than they will inform local police and higher authority about the high handiness of the zamindars for action.<sup>11</sup>

Several meetings like this were held which were attended by Gwallas from every part of the Patna division, and in these meetings discussions on various aspects of their religion and social position were done. At one of the meeting held at Muhammadpur, they laid down certain resolutions to be followed by their community, viz.

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11. Home Political Special Section, fl. No. 79/1921.

1. To educate their children.
2. To stop early marriage.
3. To keep unity among themselves.
4. To herd cows.
5. To use the sacred thread.
6. To collect one anna per 'Bigha',<sup>12</sup> from all the Gwallas cultivators and utilize the fund towards the education of their children.
7. To open shops of their own.
8. To lessen the number of cattle they had been keeping.
9. Not to do 'Begari' for Zamindars, to do all their own requirements such as shaving, washing the cloths serving as widwives, etc.
10. Not to commit thefts and
11. Not to quarrel with each other as far as possible.

They also decided to discontinue the sale of cow-dung cakes, milk, curd etc. except at the Bazar rates to their Zamindars, and forbade their women folk to hawk their goods from door to door as was the custom.<sup>13</sup>

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12. 'Bigha' is a Unit of Measuring Land.

13. Home Political Special Section Bihar and Orissa, op.cit.

Steps were taken by the Zamindars or upper castes to stop the Gwallas from becoming a threat to them. An anti-Gwalla movement was launched in 1922 which was purely retaliatory in its objects. The landlords sought the cooperation of other high castes on the plea that the Gwallas had taken the sacred thread. The first meeting of the anti-Gwallas movement was held at Andhewas police station, Sialo, in the middle of the October 1922, in the house of Maulvi Mohammed Wali, a Zamindar. The organiser of this movement was also Mohammedan of police station, Sialo.<sup>14</sup> The reprisals against the Gwallas by the landlords were-

1. To deprive them of the 'Khud-Kasht' lands and to turn them out of their houses on the ground that the houses belonged to the landlords.
2. Refusal to allow their cattle to use the ordinary grazing grounds and to take water at the ordinary drinking tanks and
3. Complete social boycott, e.g. refusal by Baniyas to sell, priests to perform religious ceremonies,

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14. Home Political Special Section, Govt. of Bihar and Orrisa, 1925, fl.No. 171.

Chamars (Harijans) to bury dead cattles, midwife services, Barbars to shave, Kumhars to serve earthen pots, Dhobis to wash and Lohars to make ploughs etc. The Gwallas of Ben-Karjara, Aminganj, Ramganj, Andhewas, Maejra, Sausa and Bana Were completely boycotted, while ordinaces were issued from Ben-to-Sahpur in the Zamindari of the Nawab of Husainabad to stop all social and domestic services to the Gwallas of that place.<sup>15</sup>

But the result of this anti Gwallas-Movement was contary to the expectations of the Zamindars. Its impact made the Gwallas to unite with greater solidarity and it gave a further impetus to them to organise. They held meetings at Ekanagar, Sari, Hilsa, Paithana, Maldi, Islampur and Sialo<sup>16</sup> and decided to establish shops as Baniyas, to perform religious duties relegated only to Brahmins, and remove their dead cattle etc. themselves.<sup>17</sup> They took to wearing the sacred thread and started carrying out their resolutions in some places. In order to give effect to their

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15. Prior H.C. Bihar and Orissa in 1922 Patna 1923, p.71.

16. File No. 79/1921, op.cit.

17. File No. 171/1925, op.cit.

resolutions, they held a series of meetings in different localities within the jurisdiction of Hilsa, Ekanagar etc.<sup>18</sup>

At Banauli, an anti Gwallas party assembled in large numbers armed with guns, swords, lathis and accompanied by drummers under the pretext of defending themselves. At that place, there happened a combat with Gwallas and it resulted in a assault to a police head constable, who himself was a Gwallas and some other Gwallas and an old women.<sup>19</sup>

With the growing opposition, the Gwallas movement became stronger with the passing time. It came up as the most well organised movement, and its agitation extended in almost every district. A congress of Gwallas called the Gop-Jatiya Sabha was called in April, 1923 where different schemes for the advancement of the caste were projected.<sup>20</sup>

The reasons for the rapid spread of the Gwallas movement were several. One prominent among them was the emphasis given on wearing sacred thread. It grew very

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18. Bihar and Orissa in 1922 (Superintendent, Govt. Printing, Bihar and Orissa, Patna, 1923 p.13.

19. Bihar and Orissa in 1923, p.7.

20. Ibid.

fast in Muzaffarpur district during 1923, about which the District Magistrate of Muzaffarpur reported- "The caste movement among the Gwallas due to insistence of their right to wear sacred thread was spreading thread was spreading in 1923".<sup>21</sup>

In purnea district of Bihar an all India Yadava Mahasabha was held on 20th April, 1924, under the presidentship of Chaudhari Badan Sinha, M.L.C of Badaun. The number of people who attended the meeting was 25,000 including 500 delegates from every part of the province where the Gwallas were inhabitants.<sup>22</sup>

The attitude of higher castes towards these movements were at first definitely hostile. The wearing of sacred thread aroused great resentment.<sup>23</sup> Their demands and claims, such as upper caste status, refusal to render any unpaid labour unpaid labour and to sell their products at privileged rates to landlords and money lenders besides their demands for occupancy rights over their lands created

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21. Confidential File No. 298/1923, Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, Pol. Special Section and Fortnightly report to the Govt. of India D.O. No. 8CT, p.I.

22. The Searchlight, 28th April, 1924.

23. Census of India, 1931, Vol. VII Bihar and Orissa Part I p. 267.

violent reactions on the part of the zamindars. Tempers between the two parties began to run high which resulted in caste riots. During 1920s, frequently there were tense situations in the rural areas.<sup>24</sup> Caste riots broke out during 1920s and 1930s. This was the only solution thought suitable by the zamindars, who invariably resented the growing caste-consciousness among the Gwallas. The twice born castes saw in them a menace to the existing socio-economic system and consequently a threat to their appropriation of the social surplus.<sup>25</sup>

A serious riot occurred at Lakhochak in lakhirarai thana on 27th May. The Gwallas of District Monghyr arranged a meeting of their caste men to discuss on the various issues regarding their improvement and to protest against the illegal exactions of the Zamindars. The gathering took place at lakhochak, within the jurisdiction of police-station lakhi sarai. The village was the Zamindari of Babu Prasadh

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24. Govt. of India, Proceedings for Home Public Department 1926, File No. 91/4.

25. W. Graham Lacey, Bihar and Orissa in 1926-27, Patna, 1928, pp.78-79.

Report on the Land Revenue Administration of the Province of Bihar and Orissa for the year 1924-25, Patna-1925. Narayan Singh. When the Gwallas came to know that the Zamindars were collecting men to stop the meeting, an information was sent to thana. When the Babhan mob arrived the sub-inspector with his staff went to reason with them where upon he and his staff were brutally assaulted and the Gwallas who went to their assistance, were also very roughly handled. The S.D.O., S.P. with a number of armed police arrived immediately after and were looking to the wounded, the Babhan mob which had already retreated again came up. The police wanted to disperse the mob but the mob 5000 to 6000 in number surrounded them including them and the Gwallas.<sup>26</sup>

The number of Babhan according to one another document was twice as that of the Gwallas. The Babhans were the aggressor who didn't leave even the police superintendent who went towards them to reasons and to explain and thus to persuade them for not attacking.<sup>27</sup>

The attack was premediated and the force used for attack was collected from a very wide area including

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26. File No. 171/1925, op.cit.

27. Ibid.



villages twelve miles away in the neighbouring thanas. The leaders however came from Rampore village situated about four miles from the scene of the riot. This village was a well known Babhan village and probably supplied a large number of men for attacking force.<sup>28</sup>

The Gwallas who had arranged a caste meeting came from a more wider area and included men from Patna district and from across the Ganges. The object of the meeting was to discuss the same subjects as discussed at meetings all over the province, including the wearing of the sacred thread as well as refusing to do 'Begari' labour for Zamindars. Most of the zamindars of the locality were Babhans, so both these subjects irritated them.<sup>29</sup>

The motive of the riot was to break-up this meeting and to try prevent the spread of the doctrine.<sup>30</sup>

The attack was predetermined one. The police received information on the morning of the 26th, day previous to the riot, that the Babhan were preparing to break-up the

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28. Ibid. and Desh, 1925.

29. Ibid.

30. Desh, 1925 June 3.

meeting. This information was conveyed to the S.P. the same evening and he went out to the spot during the night. The local police had arrived the same evening. The first attack was made at dawn on the 27th may. The local sub-inspector with a head constable, three constables and twelve chaukidars went out to check the Babhan mob but these were at once wiped out. But the mob was checked at this stage and started retreating. The S.P. appeared as the mob was retreating, though he was perhaps not aware of that any riot had occurred. He attempted to get in touch with the mob with whom he noticed men mounting on two or three elephant and ponies. The mob evaded him and so he continued on his way to the village at Lackhochak, where he saw the crowd of Gwallas. Between the railway and the village he came across two wounded Gwallas and the corpse of one Babhan.<sup>31</sup> This was the result of an isolated attack on parties of mob-coming to either join the meeting or the fighting as it was some distance away from the spot, where the police were attacked. While the S.P. was attending to these men, the mob of Babhan was noticed again advancing. The police party took up a position on extreme left of the Gwallas opposite a mob of about the one or two thousand Babhans. Another mob of about the same number were advancing on the right flank. The

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31. Ibid.

superintendent of police got in touch with the party opposite to him and checked them for a few movement but the other mob arrived crossing a river which separated the two parties. After this the situation went beyond control and the general melee commenced. By firing across. The front of the advancing mob, some nearest were any how checked. The force of the police and the Gwallas were gradually driven back to the houses of the village, a distance of two or three distance yards.<sup>32</sup> About half-way to the village, a Babhan got into the police party and attacked the superintendent of police, striking him on the head with a lathi, but he was saved due cap (hat) he was wearing. The mob finally retreated.<sup>33</sup>

Casualties from the gun shot was ascertained as five Babhan got wounded, one killed, one Gwallas killed.<sup>34</sup>

From Lahti 6 Gwallas were wounded and one Babhan.<sup>35</sup>

The principal leaders were arrested numbering six and thirty others too. Gradually the arrest was continued on the

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32. Ibid.

33. Desh, June 4, 1925.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

basis of witnesses and the total number came about eighty.<sup>36</sup>

The local police it seems was negligent in not anticipating the riot and so they didn't take any preventive action. Some sources makes this doubt likely true that the police were in favour of the Gwallas because the Gwallas had bribed them of rupees seven hundred. The arrests made by the police was arbitrary in nature, and was according to the liking of the police. The reason for arresting the influential people was to get money, as they could afford to pay for not being sent up.<sup>37</sup>

An inquiry was started and the Babhan accused tried their best to dissuade the Gwallas, who were mostly their tenants from giving evidence on behalf of the crown, but the Gwallas stood firm and gave evidences on what basis the charges were framed. There after the Babhan on false pretense of only convening a meeting obtained the thumb mark of one or two Gwallas and put it before the District Magistrate with a petition of withdrawal. But the Gwallas by sending telegrams to the District Magistrate stated the

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36. File- 171/1925. op.cit.

37. Home Department, Political, Special Section, fl. No. 7/1926.

truth of the facts that the thumb mark were taken forcibly.<sup>38</sup>

The Babhan then brought about a mass meeting at Lakhisarai collecting several hundred Gwallas and it was finally decided that the Gwallas would not give witnesses on behalf of the Crown against them. The Babhan in the meantime instituted against the witnesses false criminal cases and numerous civil suits for rent amounting several thousand of rupees.<sup>39</sup>

On 5th January 1926, the accused (Babhans) applied for time to get prepared for cross examination and were allowed so. In between they tried to get the cases withdrawn, but the Gwallas petitioned against it, stating that if the cases, were unconditionally withdrawn, the Babhan will great freedom crush the Gwallas in false civil and criminal cases which they had already launched and will not hesitate to kill them even. They were ready to come forward as prosecution witness on behalf of the crown. The Gwallas demanded protection also, which if not granted would leave them with only alternative to renounce the home of their ancestors, and to go to distant districts with their women

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38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

and children, as they stated, to seek livelihood in unknown lands.<sup>40</sup>

The feeling between the Gwallas and Babhans in Lakhisarai was still very strained. On 1st march 1926, the Gwallas held a meeting and resolved that they would refrain from doing any menial work for the higher caste Hinduism future, that the sacred thread and prevention of their women from selling milk and collecting fuel will continue.<sup>41</sup>

The lenient punishment meted out to the Babhans in the Lakhochak riot case did not ease tension between the two communities. During 1930s, there were several caste riots in the province<sup>42</sup>

One thing seems interesting that the Gwallas from the lower and the Bhumiars from the upper caste are found involved in caste-riots chiefly. The concentration of Gwallas was most numerous in the district of Darbhanga<sup>43</sup>, but no riot so far occurred there. It seems that the

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40. File No. 7/1926.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Census of India, 1931, Vol. VII. Bihar and Orissa, Part I, P. 270-271.

Bhumihar landlords and their oppression were much severe, wherever they were in prominence, as they were in Lakhisarai. Moreover the Gwallas and the Bhumihars had the landlord-tenant relationship, but since the division of labour was based on caste-line, the riot also takes the nature of caste riot. To some extent, the fight was an expression of the oppression of zamindars to the labourers or tenants.

### CONSEQUENCES

The caste-riots had its serious impact on society. It divided the entire population into two major groups with deep antagonism and hostility. It fostered caste consciousness which grew deeper day by day.<sup>44</sup>

Later the attitude appeared considerably modified. According to some accounts the former hostility had given place to indifference.<sup>45</sup>

One impact was fruitful on the part of the lower caste especially Kurmis and Gwalla, that their number in education increased. According to 1931 census, among the

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44. The Literature of the Time Like "Maila Aanchal" Supports This, pp.13-15 18-20,23-24,28-29,32,37,40.

45. Census 1931, Vol-VII, Bihar and Orissa Part, F.p.267.

Kurmis and Gwallas forty to fifty persons were literate out of one thousand.<sup>46</sup>

The Yadavas aimed at ridding their caste of dowry, alcoholism, and strove for many progressive measures. They sought to increase the educational facilities for their youth and they dominated educational institutions some years after the independence.<sup>47</sup>

One of the remote impact of the riot was the growth of political awareness among the lower castes specially the Yadavas. The Yadavas with Kurmis, Koeris formed together the political party called Triveni Sabha. The Tirbeni Sabha contested the 1936 elections in Shahabad and Patna district, though with disastrous result. In Bihar the entry of Yadavas into politics in general and the Congress Party in particular was almost totally controlled and governed by the extent of rivalry among the forward castes. Discussing the entry of the peasant castes into Bihar Congress, Roy writes "At the time of their entry into politics, most of these caste groups functioned as appendages of the main contenders in the upper castes, leaders from the upper castes co-opted

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46. Ibid.

47. Mandal Commission Report.



men from the lower castes to leadership position.<sup>48</sup> Each of the peasant castes entered the congress divided, but in due course of time they became autonomous. According to data, between 1934 to 1946, the percentage of lower castes in Bihar Pradesh Congress executive committee, was 7.70 in 1936, 5.88 in 1937.<sup>49</sup>

The riot had though remote significant impact on the Kissan Movement in Bihar. The most influential Kissan leader Sahajanand Saraswati could not dissociate himself from his caste men, and in the factional politics of Bihar, he always sided with his caste men who happened to be big Zamindars. His sympathy and support to Ganesh Dutta Singh, a landlord and pro-British politician.<sup>50</sup> His alliance with Sri Krishna Singh a prominent politician of Bihar in 1936 reveals his pro-Bhumihar sympathy also.<sup>51</sup>

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48. Roy Ramesh - Caste and Political Recruitment in Bihar, in R.Kothari ed., Castes in Indian Politics. p.28.

49. Ibid., p.28.

50. Mishra and Pandey, Socio-Economic Roots of Casteism in Bihar, p.172.

51. The Searchlight, June 6 and Jan. 1936 and the Indian Nation, June 6 & 7, 1936.

## CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter, We have seen the rise and growth of Caste - Consciousness and Caste - Conflicts generating in turn casteism in Bihar. This casteism or caste patriotism (the term used by Ghurye) is one of the serious social problem of contemporary India.

It has been speculated by some sociologists like Leach and Louis Dumont that caste system ceases to remain a system when they engage in organised politics.<sup>1</sup> No doubt, caste in the traditional sense is certainly changing but there is continuity in name, personnel and identity. Moreover, interaction of caste with modern politics has given more strength to the institution of caste.

Actually the genesis of casteism is inherent in the kinship structure of caste. The kinship structure, which emerges through endogamy imparts solidarity within the castes, while the restriction on exogamy increases the potential of conflicts between the castes. In those days, in each locality, the individual castes functioned as

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1. E.R. Leach (ed), Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan, pp.6-7.

And Dumont Louis, op.cit, pp.264-275.

kinship groups needed by about five (panch) respectable members of the caste. This board or 'Panchayat' of caste resolved conflicts between individuals within the caste and kept vigilance over the observation of caste customs. There was no clearly defined method how to solve inter caste conflicts or disputes. In addition, the hierarchical customs were so deep rooted within the mind of the people that such disputes could be easily solved by the verdicts given by the upper caste men in an undemocratic discussion. By customary practices, the nearly a hundred jatis found in each locality were arranged in hierarchy of social status. It was believed that the hierarchy owes its origin by the ancient varna system of the vedic days, which was more an occupational division of the underdeveloped Aryan society in four occupational groups - Brahmin (priests) Kashatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (artisans) and Shudras (slaves). But the relationship between the varna and jati system was vague and appears to be a conscious propaganda under taken later to justify the supremacy of the Brahmins.

The crusade against caste system began first during the days of Buddha himself who preached the doctrine of equality among men and for several centuries provided the mainstay of those who wanted to escape the caste oppression. Later, in the middle ages Islam had served the purpose, when

numerous lower castes people had embraced that religion in areas like Bengal. Still later, saints like Kabir had preached the idea of equality among men. The christian missionaries were successful mostly among the lower castes and the tribal people. But the caste - system in India has spread the venomous hatred between the different people to such a depth that even after being converts to a new religion the Indian people do not stop this hateful discriminatory practices. Thus, the idea of caste division, so alien to Islam elsewhere, is found in the form of certain exogamous restrictions among the Indian Muslims. Being afraid that they would not be able to attract the higher castes people to agree to conversion, the christen missions, with rare exception allowed them to retain the caste distinction. The same is the case among the sikhs and the jews in India.

It is visualised, generally that with the spread of modern education changes occurred in the Indian society but this is not outrightly correct. Though, the Indian social order in eighteenth century did not present a bright picture but the social evils did not go unchallenged, even during this period. Various heterodox sects denounced polytheism, idolatry, caste distinctions and other taboos. Besides, it

can be argued that substantial changes were occurring within various walks of social life. Caste order was also under going some sort of change. Fragmentation, occupational mobility and sanskritization were some of the indicators. Intellectual activities marked with individual brilliance went on as in preceding centuries. The artistic and intellectual activities did not show signs of decadence, but a high level of creativity.<sup>2</sup> It was further helped by the spread of western education, the scope of economic upliftment in the non-traditional way and the occasional supporting legislations by the government, which gave speedy impetus to caste reforms. The early reformers of the nineteenth century like Rammohan, Vivekanand, Dayanand or Ranade, had campaigned for such reforms as the spread of English education, imposing a ban on the ghastly custom of immolation of widows, popularisation of the marriage of widows, restricting child marriage or lifting of social restrictions on overseas travel. Although, the pioneers were concerned with Hindu society as a whole, in due course the young English educated youth in many parts of the country had followed their teachings and undertook the task of

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2. K.N. Panikkar, Presidential Address, Indian History Congress. 1975, (Memographed).

reform within their receptive castes alone, for the obvious reason that caste Panchayats' were the most important social organisation in Hindu society.

The kinship type of feeling that exists among the same caste men has motivated many reformers inspired by the ideas of social reform to undertake developmental tasks, like spread of education, for their own castemen alone.

Upto the end of nineteenth century the caste reforms and caste conflicts were confined to certain local pockets. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, few events turned them into a mass phenomenon : the census operation, the development of class struggles in the countryside.

For the first time, information regarding the caste names of individuals was collected during the fourth census operation in the year 1901. The enumeration returned as many as 2378 different caste and tribes all over India. Naturally the question of categorization propped up. Thus the census operation on the one hand induced every individual to become conscious of this caste status and, on the other hand, extended the scope of disputes regarding hierarchy between every caste. For categorization, the

method first attempted, was to establish correspondence of each jati with one or the other of the four ancient varnas. The result was that for example, the white collar writer caste enjoying high social status was placed in the third grade as Vaishya along with the peasant and artisan castes enough to cause much heart burning for the writer caste who were already enjoying a high social status. Some other middle ranking castes were categorized as shudras along with the untouchable castes. They too were equally agitated. The census officers received hundreds of applications from various castes and tribes - with requests for revision of the status assigned to them. the usual pattern followed in those actions was to search for some famous character in the ancient books who had followed an occupation, similar to their own, yet enjoyed a high social status and to claim themselves as the descendants of that famous man. Since suppression by the caste system was not so acute in the very ancient times, such characters were not difficult to find. Along with these applications, usually some more steps were taken for improving the caste status, e.g. assuming upper caste titles wearing the thread, a prerogative of Brahmins, etc. These moves became very wide spread during the first part of the twentieth century and brought the caste Panchayat to the modern social process. The census

categorization enabled them to identify other castes, pursuing similar occupations, in different parts of the country. Thereafter, various castes from different parts of the country combined to form caste organisations of their own. They retained their differences in traditional functions like marriage, but began to act as one caste in modern social and political affairs. It even enabled several different castes of the same locality to unite.

The second factor that helped the development of caste movements was the rising tempo of caste struggles in the countryside. The economic mobility that was allowed under the colonial rule had shattered the parity between the economic status and caste status which was essential for the continuation of the domination of one caste over another. Those members of the lower castes who could improve their economic conditions began to aspire for higher social status and naturally rallied to their all castemen to do the same. Like the Justice Movement in Madras which began with the object of delivering non-Brahmins from the subjection of Brahmins. In Bihar the rise of Gwalla movement has some similarity with this, but here they rose not against Brahmins in particular but against the oppression of upper caste zamindars.



The rise of caste feeling was also caused by government policies such as recognition of castes in certain official matters, like the granting of economic privileges. Certain caste were declared martial race and for them jobs were easily secured in army. Some others as criminal caste barred from joining army and police. In 1894, such a restriction imposed upon the kurmis, led to agitations in lucknow which paved the way for the formation of all India Kurmi Maha Shaba Yadava claimed for a separate regiment for them like the jat and Maratha regiment.

Thus we see that how the Govt. policies such as census operations, and others contributed to the caste feelings. In Bihar protests were launched by Bhumihars and Kayasthas by the most powerful men among them for the upliftment of their caste- status.

The caste struggle in the early twentieth century, posed immense difficulties of characterisation. On the one hand were those struggles by the depressed people for the assertion of their prestige, on the other hand the motive forces included the aspirations of the low castes to be considered higher in status than some others who had been considered as their equals till then. The caste movements had helped in the spread of education and such other reforms

as post-ponement of the age of marriage. At the Same time they established old values like wearing the sacred thread. Many Bhumihars, as we have seen in their eagerness to receive the upper caste-status, had begun protesting the Brahminical taboo of not touching the plough. Of the other movements like those of Yadavas and kurmis have a special significance. Occupationally these castes were mostly tenants and the zamindar - tenant economic relation was in accordance with the upper caste -backward caste social relations. Antagonised as they were by the age-old evils of zamindari system the passing of the Tenancy Act by the end of the last century recognising the rights of tenants vis-a-vis zamindars, the later turned more hostile to the cause of the tenants. Large number of zamindars turned absentee and were interested only in the realization of rents. Irrigation facilities stopped functioning in the villages due to lack of maintenance. as a Result, the tenants lost respect for the zamindars ending in as the complete absence of backward castes habitual respect for the upper castes. Along with the social reforms movement among the backward castes, they stopped the practice of customary pranamas and other courtesies to the upper castes. The zamindars opposed these movements vehemently and thus the whole of the twenties evidenced several bloody clashes fought on this

issue. However due to the effects of the steady pressure built up from below, the upper castes gradually gave up their opposition and became more or less accustomed to seeing exclusively upper caste practices being adopted by the Kurmis and Yadavas.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Census of India, 1931, Vol. VII, Bihar and Orissa, Part I, p.267.

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